

The Lord's Message: Prophecy Fulfilled: The Birth of John the Baptist

Date: December 15, 2021

Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: Luke 1:57-66

We are continuing our sermon series: Prophecy Fulfilled. There are 400 prophecies in the Old Testament that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled. We learned about an older married couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth who had no children. God sent the angel, Gabriel, to Zechariah. Zechariah was going about his priestly duties in the Holy of Holies area of the temple when Gabriel appears to him. In **Luke 1:13-17**, Gabriel announces to Zechariah that God has heard the prayers of his and Elizabeth. God is answering their prayers with the conception of a special baby boy. Zechariah questions how can this happen, as both he and Elizabeth are well past the age of child bearing. Gabriel tells him because of his unbelief, Zechariah will remain mute until the appropriate time. This boy would be special, because he would have the same power and spirit of Elijah. This boy would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." This would fulfill the prophecy found in **Malachi 4:5-6**. We concluded with a pregnant Elizabeth. That was Part 1. Here is Part 2.

Let us pray.

We pick up the story in **Luke 1:57**. Elizabeth gives birth to a son. Of course, the announcement of the birth of a child brings great excitement and joy as explained in verse 58. Couple that with the fact that the parents are well past the age of child bearing, the excitement and joy is over the top. God has performed a miracle.

In verse 59a, as was the custom that had been passed down from God to Moses, Zechariah and Elizabeth go to the temple to have the baby boy circumcised. During the ceremony of circumcision, the baby is given his Hebrew name. An old Christian custom similar to this is a "christening." During the "christening," the baby receives its Christian name. In the Roman Catholic tradition, dating back to the Fourth Century, "St. John Chrysostom strongly encouraged parents to choose for their children names of holy men and women known for their strength and virtue, in order that the children might look to them as role models."

Zechariah and Elizabeth brought the baby to the priest for the circumcision. The priest asked what should this baby be named. Of course, Zechariah can not speak, he is still unable to talk. Now, everybody is thinking that the baby will be named Zechariah. So, in verse 59b, Elizabeth speaks up and says that he will be called John. This creates quite a stir. Look at verses 60-61. Now if we recall what the angel, Gabriel said in verse 13, "and you are to give him the name John." If we also remember what was said of Elizabeth and Zechariah, that they "observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly." They asked Zechariah what the name of this child would be and Zechariah wrote "John."

Now the name of a child is not so much a big deal today. In this church, we have a family that has four living generations named "David." This family is the "Millers." If you were a "Miller" living on Tilghman, then your occupation would be as a "waterman." This is tradition.

In the same way the tradition for the lineage of Zechariah is for this child to be named "Zechariah." The child's occupation would be as a priest serving in the temple of God. By naming this child, "John," this signifies that this child is not going to take the same pathway as his father, his grandfather, his great grandfather, and his great-great grandfather. The tradition is going to be broken. God has called this child that will grow up to be a man with a purpose different than those that have come before him.

Elizabeth either sensed this by the Holy Spirit or Zechariah explained this to her by using a chalk and tablet. Either way, Elizabeth knew there was something different about this child. Zechariah knew it by what the angel, Gabriel, had told him.

Look what happens to Zechariah after writing the name, "John." In verse 64, it says, "Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God." Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit. Anyone filled with the Holy Spirit cannot keep quiet. They have to praise God or they are going to explode. What Zechariah may have said is recorded as the Benedictus in verses 67-79.

In this Benedictus, Zechariah foretells God's plan for this child. In verses 76-79, this child is going to a prophet of the Most High. This child is going to go before the Lord to prepare people to receive God. This child is going to convince people that they are sinners, but God is going to forgive them, because of God's mercy. This child is going to shine a light into the dark places where people are living and even upon death. This child is going to guide us into a path of peace. Peace with God and peace with each other. All of this is possible because of the love that God has for us.

The prophecy of Malachi is coming to fulfillment in this child, John. How do I know this? Look at **Luke 3:2-3**, “the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” John would prepare the way for the Messiah.

How about us? For those that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to prepare the way for people to hear and know about the Messiah. What are we doing to prepare the way for someone to receive the Messiah? I think it would be a fantastic Christmas, if one of our friends, family members or even a stranger, accepted Jesus into their hearts. Amen.