

Introduction

A few weeks ago we received a call from our daughter Sarah. In fact, they sent a message to us with a picture message. Each person held up a poster with a message on it. Their son, Asher, held up a poster saying he was thankful he was going to be a brother. It was a way of announcing the good news that a baby was on the way. Sarah is due in June.



A couple of months ago, we received a group text message from our daughter Julie, and there was a picture in it. It was a picture of the ultrasound that the doctors made. It was another creative way of announcing the good news that she was expecting their first child. Julie is due at the end of March. (Picture of Ultrasound in PPT)

The announcement about a baby on the way is an exciting announcement. Between the Old and New Testament, scholars tell us there has been no message from the Lord for four hundred years. All at once, there are some angelic visitations and some spectacular baby announcements are made. God the Father chose an exciting way to announce the coming births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

John tells us in Revelation 5:11 that there are myriads of angels around the throne. The KJV says there are ten thousand times ten thousand angels around the throne, which comes to one hundred million (100,000,000) angels with my math. We are not sure of exactly how many angels there are, but there are lots of them. God did not send just any angel; He sent Gabriel to make the announcement about John to Zacharias, and the announcement about Jesus to Mary. The Father must have been pretty excited. It is also something for us to be excited about.

Last week ago we briefly looked at the Introduction to the Gospel of Luke. Paul describe Luke in Colossians as the beloved physician. Luke was loved by everyone. When I think of someone that is loved by everyone, several things come to mind. First, he was probably very loving. You reap what you sow. He loved people and so people loved him. He probably served people and was very unselfish. He was probably very kind towards other. So, the first thing that we find out about Luke was that he was loved by everyone. If there is one thing that I want our church to be known as, it is a loving church. Jesus said that by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

(Col 4:14) Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

(John 13:35) "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Paul describes Luke as a beloved physician. Luke was obviously very well educated. I am not sure what kind of training he went through in his day, but physicians today typically have eight to twelve years of schooling and interning after graduating with their bachelor degree. Luke had medical training, and was regarded as a physician. Greek scholars point out many phrases that he used in Luke and Acts that would only have been used by physicians.

02 God's Announcement of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25)

I like the balance that Luke brought to Paul's team. Many people were healed through Paul's ministry. If you recall the account of Paul on the island of Malta, everyone on the island got healed. God heals people through spiritual means. In this passage, Paul identifies Luke as a physician. There is nothing malicious or evil about him being a physician. People understood that a physician helped bring healing to people through natural means. I suspect that Luke was a physician that ministered healing in natural ways and spiritual ways. I can see him praying with his patients. I love the balance that Luke brings.

There are some people in the church that say that every doctor is a liar and they speak of the medical world in demeaning ways. Luke was a physician, and he was a man of truth. He wrote this gospel so that people would know the exact truth. When we minister to people, we want them to be healed. Whether God heals supernaturally or through a physician, it really does not matter to me. My heart is to see people made whole and to be healed. I think this is God's heart.

Luke took time to investigate everything very carefully. He gave two reasons for writing his gospel account to Theophilus. He addresses Theophilus as "most excellent Theophilus." This term "most excellent" was generally given to kings, governors, or other prominent government official. (See Acts 23:26, 24:3 (most excellent Felix), and Acts 26:25 (most excellent Festus – who replaced Felix as governor). It is likely that Theophilus was a government official. Luke wanted Theophilus to know the exact truth and to have the consecutive order that all those things took place.

Unlike Luke, we have not covered things in consecutive order. Karen covered the announcement of Jesus' birth, and this morning we are going to cover the announcement of John the Baptist's birth, which came before the announcement about Jesus. The preaching schedule got revised to open up a spot for Colt Prehm to come and minister and to give the missions team an opportunity to share. Therefore, the date for the message that she was giving got changed. One of the principles in God's word that we try to follow is to honor your mother and father. God promises that if we honor our mother and father, things will go well for us, and we will live a long life. It is one of the principles of success. We must honor those in authority, and it begins in the family. Karen is in Cincinnati spending some time with her mother and father. Her parents are elderly, and her mother is paralyzed.

Karen covered the announcement to Mary of Jesus' birth, the confirmation of that announcement from Elizabeth, and Mary's exultation and praise. This week we will be going back and picking up the announcement of John the Baptist's birth. John was the forerunner of Christ, and it is appropriate that it is given before the announcement of Jesus' birth. Next week, Tony Vaughn will be covering the fulfillment of the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist, and Zacharias' prophecy. Then, on December 23, at our Christmas celebration, I will be covering the fulfillment of the announcement about the birth of Jesus Christ.

This morning we will be looking at three specific areas. First, we will look at John's heritage. Second, we will look at Gabriel's visit with Zacharias. Third, we will look at Zacharias' return to his home.

God's Birth Announcement of John the Baptist

1. John's Heritage
2. Gabriel's Visit with Zacharias
3. Zacharias' Return Home

1. John's Heritage

We find that this announcement came in the days of Herod, who was king of Judea. The announcement came to a priest named Zacharias, who was of the division of Abijah. As we go back into the Old Testament, Aaron and his four sons were made priests. Two of his sons died, leaving Eleazar and Ithamar to serve as priests. David divided up the priests according to the offices that they were serving in. Eleazar had more descendants than Ithamar, so more lots were given to him.

(Luke 1:5) "In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah..."

(1 Chr 24:1-6) "Now the divisions of the descendants of Aaron were these: the sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. {2} But Nadab and Abihu died before their father and had no sons. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests. {3} David, with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to their offices for their ministry. {4} Since more chief men were found from the descendants of Eleazar than the descendants of Ithamar, they divided them thus: there were sixteen heads of fathers' households of the descendants of Eleazar and eight of the descendants of Ithamar, according to their fathers' households. {5} Thus they were divided by lot, the one as the other; for they were officers of the sanctuary and officers of God, both from the descendants of Eleazar and the descendants of Ithamar. {6} Shemaiah, the son of Nethanel the scribe, from the Levites, recorded them in the presence of the king, the princes, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and the heads of the fathers' households of the priests and of the Levites; one father's household taken for Eleazar and one taken for Ithamar."

Zacharias was of the division of Abijah. Of the lots chosen by David, Abijah was the eighth lot. Zacharias came from a long lineage of priests. They served in the temple according to their chosen lot.

(1 Chr 24:7-19) "Now the first lot came out for Jehoiarib, the second for Jedaiah, {8} the third for Harim, the fourth for Seorim, {9} the fifth for Malchijah, the sixth for Mijamin, {10} the seventh for Hakkoz, **the eighth for Abijah**, ...{19} These were their offices for their ministry when they came in to the house of the LORD according to the ordinance given to them through Aaron their father, just as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him."

Zacharias was married to Elizabeth, who was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were Pks. All their fathers had been priests for thousands of years.

(Luke 1:5-7) "...and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God. It is one thing to be called righteous by men, but to be called righteous in the sight of God is something special. Luke adds that they walked blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. The Greek word is amemptos (Strong's G273), which means without blame or fault.

(Luke 1:6) "They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord."

John's parents were godly and upright people. **Children of the righteous are blessed**. John is blessed to have come from a godly family. Proverbs says "a righteous man who walks in his integrity – how blessed are his sons after him."

(Pro 20:7) "A righteous man who walks in his integrity— How blessed are his sons after him."

The problem with that promise in Proverbs is it refers to your children, and Zacharias and Elizabeth had no children. Luke says, "but they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren." To make things worse, he tells us that "they were both advanced in years." In other words, they were too old to have children. They were past the childbearing years.

(Luke 1:7) "But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years."

I do not consider myself advanced in years, but we are past our child bearing years. Unless God does something supernatural, like He did for Sarah and Abraham, we will not have any more natural children. I believe that Zacharias and Elizabeth were much older than Karen and I; they were advanced in years.

2. Gabriel's Visit with Zacharias

After giving us some background information about Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke gives us a detailed account of Gabriels's conversation with Zacharias. First, he shares about the message to Zacharias. Then, he shares Zacharias' response. Finally, he tells about Zacharias' discipline that he receives for his lack of belief.

A. Gabriel's message to Zacharias

There were about 18,000 priests at that time. They had divided up the priests into twenty-four different groups. Since they could not all perform their duties at one time, they cast lots to see who got to enter the temple and burn incense. **Zacharias was chosen by lot**. We do not know exactly how that was done. I would suspect that they first draw lots for which of the twenty-four divisions was to serve. Then, I suspect that they would keep drawing lots for subgroups of the division chosen until they finally drew the names of those who would serve. We do not use lots today, but they were frequently used in the Old and New Testament.

(Luke 1:8-9) "Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, {9} according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense."

Karen and I frequently used lots in raising a big family. There was no fighting over who got to sit by the window in our 15-passenger van. There was no fighting over who got the front row, and who had to sit in the very back of the van. We drew lots. Once a month, they drew lots for seats in the van. They would have to sit there until the next drawing. We also drew lots every week for table assignments. The use of lots helped bring peace and order in our family. Solomon tells us that the lot puts an end to strife, and decides between the mighty ones. There was no strife among who got to serve in the temple. They simply drew lots and accepted the decision.

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(Pro 18:18) "The cast lot puts an end to strife And decides between the mighty ones.

Solomon also tells us that the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. That tells me that it is no coincidence that the lot is cast and Zacharias was chosen to serve at the temple at this particular time. It was the Lord's decision and plan to use Zacharias.

(Pro 16:33) "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD."

In the New Testament, just before Pentecost, there were 120 people in the upper room. Peter stands up and tells them that according to Scripture, another man that had accompanied them with Jesus must take the place of Judas. They pick two men, Joseph and Matthias, and the lot fell to Matthias. **Matthias was added to the eleven apostles by lot.** Some preachers teach that the lot should not be used any longer since we have the Holy Spirit. I agree that we should rely upon the Holy Spirit, but I see nothing in the New Testament that rescinds what was written in the Old Testament about lots.

(Acts 1:21-26) "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us {22} beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." {23} So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. {24} And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen {25} to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." {26} And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles."

Some theologians have said that this was done in the flesh, and that Paul is the twelfth apostle. They say there are only twelve apostles. In one way, they are correct. There are twelve apostles of the Lamb; we find that in Revelations. However, there are about thirty men who are called apostles in the New Testament. The qualifications for the apostles of the Lamb were different than for other apostles. Paul was an apostle, but not one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The apostles of the Lamb had to accompany Jesus all the time that He was with them.

Luke tells us that the whole multitude of people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. **Incense is symbolic of prayer.** In Psalm 141:2, David prays, "Let my prayer be set forth as incense before You." In Revelation 5:8, the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. It is pretty clear that the incense represents prayer. It is the hour of prayer and people were assembled together at the temple to pray.

(Luke 1:10) "And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.

(Psalm 141:2) "May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering."

(Rev 5:8) "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

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I like the fact that there was a whole multitude of people. Many times, there are not multitudes for prayer. Churches feel that they have to entertain people to draw multitudes. I long to see multitudes of people gathered together for an hour of prayer. We must develop the same passion and priority for prayer that the early church had.

Notice in Revelation 5:8 that the elders that fell down before the Lamb were worshipping the Lamb. Also notice that each had a harp and golden bowls of incense. **Godly elders must be worshippers of the Lamb and people of prayer.** Godly elders must have an intimate relationship with the Lord, evidenced by worship and prayer. When the widows were overlooked in Acts 6, the twelve apostles, who were the first elders in the church at Jerusalem told the congregation to choose seven men to handle the administration of food. As for them, they needed to be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word.

(Acts 6:4) "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Most scholars use Exodus 30 in their interpretation, which says there are two hours of incense. Moses instructs Aaron to burn incense in the morning, and in the evening. If this is the correct interpretation, Luke does not specify whether it was morning or evening. Most believe it was during the morning offering of incense.

(Ex 30:8) "When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations."

While Zacharias is there offering the incense, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias is troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him.

(Luke 1:11-12) "And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. {12} Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him."

Daniel recorded a vision where he had seen Gabriel. He said that "when he came I was frightened and fell on my face." Daniel's response is very similar to Zacharias' response.

(Dan 8:16-17) "And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and he called out and said, "Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision." {17} So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end."

Gabriel tries to put Zacharias at ease, telling him, "do not be afraid, Zacharias." The word angel comes from the Greek word *aggelos*, which means messenger. Gabriel had been sent to Daniel to give him a message. Gabriel had been sent to Zacharias to give him a message. He was not there to bring fear. Based upon both of their responses, I believe that he is probably a big and strong, which was very intimidating to both of them.

(Luke 1:13) "But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias..."

Gabriel tells Zacharias that his petition has been heard, and that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son, and that he is to name him John. Zacharias must have asked or petitioned the Lord for a son.

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(Luke 1:13) "But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John."

Gabriel goes on to tell Zacharias about his son that he will have. He says, "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth." **Childbirth is something to rejoice about.** You do not have to hand out pink cigars, but you should rejoice and celebrate the birth of children. Karen and I had ten children of our own, and we know what joy it is when the babies are born. We would call everyone and share our joy with our parents. It is a very joyful occasion.

(Luke 1:14) "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth."

Then, Gabriel tell Zacharias a prophecy about John's life. Gabriel is sent by God to give this word to Zacharias about the son they were going to have. God wanted to reveal John's name, calling, and purpose. God uses parents to help children find direction and purpose in life. One of the reasons that about 98% of eighteen-year olds do not know what they want to do in life is because there is a leak of relationship between parents and children.

Gabriel begins by saying that **John was going to be great in the sight of the Lord.** We can think of great people on earth. Peyton Manning is a great quarterback, maybe the greatest ever. Tiger Woods is a great golfer, maybe the greatest ever. Albert Einstein was a great scientist, discovering the theory of relativity. There are lots of great men in the world, but how many are great in the sight of the Lord?

(Luke 1:15-17) "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. {16} "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. {17} "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

This week Nelson Mandela died at the age of 95. Here was a great man. Why was he a great man? He was a great man because he helped change a nation. He fought against apartheid, spent time in prison for his efforts. He was released from prison in 1990, and was elected to be the President of South Africa in 1993. He was the first black president. He preached forgiveness and reconciliation. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for his work in bringing peace and reconciliation to South Africa. Nelson Mandela was a great man because he changed a nation.

In a similar way, John the Baptist was going to change a nation. He was going to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children. He was going to help bring social and religious change in a country that had forsaken the Lord. He was going to help change the disobedient to become righteous. He was going to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. He was going to be great in the sight of God. John was going to have the anointing of Elijah on him. He was going to do it in the power of Elijah. We looked at the process of evangelism a few weeks ago in Colossians. All of us are to be involved in make ready a people prepared for the Lord. We are to make the most of the opportunities that we have with outsiders. That change starts in us and ripples through all our relationships.

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John would drink no wine or liquor. This may refer to being a Nazirite for life. In Numbers we find that a Nazirite vow was a vow of dedication to the Lord. Someone who took a Nazirite vow was not allowed to have alcoholic beverages, or even grape juice during the specified period. They were not allowed to cut their hair, or go near a dead person. There were specific regulations for people taking a Nazirite vow. These are found in Numbers 6.

(Num 6:2-3) "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, {3} he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes."

Some Nazirites were Nazirites for life. Samson was supposed to be a Nazirite for life. An angel appeared to Manoah, Samson's mother, and told her that Samson would be a Nazirite for life.

(Judges 13:7) "But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

Gabriel says that he would not drink alcohol, but that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18, we are told not to be drunk with wine but to be filled with the Holy Spirit. John sets a good example for us.

(Eph 5:18) "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,"

Gabriel prophesies that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. We saw last week that when Mary came to visit Elizabeth, John was filled with the Holy Spirit and leaped for joy. **Life begins at conception, not at delivery.** John was alive, and got filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb. John leaped out of joy. Babies in the womb have feelings and emotions. **Babies in the womb have a body, soul, and spirit.**

(Luke 1:44) "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy."

One final comment on Gabriel's message to Zacharias. God very often speaks to parents about the calling and life of their children. God is the one that forms us in the womb. God is the one that knows the days allotted to each of us. God is the one that knows how many hairs are on our head. God knows the calling and the purposes that He has for each of us. And very often he communicates that through parents. In this case, God sent Gabriel, the messenger, to give the prophetic word to Zacharias about the life and calling of John.

If John had not listened to his parents, he would have missed out on what God had called him to be and to do. Children, listen to your parents. Parents, seek the Lord on behalf of your children. Pray and ask God for wisdom and direction. Ask Him for a prophetic word for your children. I used to keep a file on each of my children. Any time there was a prophetic word for that child, I stuck in that file. I recorded their testimonies of how they came to Christ and put them in that file. Later on, they were happy to learn about all the circumstances that led to their salvation. Parents, take time to help your children discern God's will and get the direction they need.

B. Zacharias' response

Zacharias' responds with unbelief. He asks Gabriel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." What Zacharias said is true. He was an old man and his wife was advanced in years. Unless God supernaturally intervenes, they could not have a child. But Zacharias was not asking how this was to happen; he was asking if this would happen. When Gabriel told Mary that she was going to bear a child, she asked how this was going to happen since she was a virgin. She did not ask if this would happen. Her next response was, "may it be done according to your word." We should not doubt what the Lord tells us. It is good to ask for clarification and for more information. If we lack doubt, tell the Lord. Ask Him to help us in our unbelief.

(Luke 1:18) "Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."

(Luke 1:34-38) " Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"... And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

His response reminds me of the early church that was praying for Peter's release from prison. God does supernaturally lead Peter out of prison, and when he shows up at the door, there was disbelief about what they had asked God for. They told Rhoda, the servant-girl, that she was out of her mind.

(Acts 12:5, 12-16) "So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. {16} And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. {13} When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. {14} When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. {15} They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." {16} But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.

Zacharias had petitioned the Lord for a son, and now an answer was sent to him by Gabriel and he is lacking belief. Sometimes God answers prayers despite our lack of belief. In prayer, ask God anyway, even if you lack faith. If you do lack faith, ask Him for faith. Say, "help me in my unbelief." If you don't know how to pray, ask God for wisdom about how to pray. Zacharias prayed and God heard, answered, and gave him his petition, even though he lacked faith.

When the Lord visited Abraham and Sarah, and told them that they were going to have a son, Sarah laughed. The Lord calls her out on it, and says, "why did Sarah laugh...Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

(Gen 18:11-14) "Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. {12} Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" {13} And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' {14} "Is anything too difficult for the LORD?..."

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I share these two illustrations with you to let you know that nothing is impossible for God. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord. Your situation that you find yourself in may look impossible, but it is not too difficult for the Lord. Your situation may look dire, but there is hope with God. Don't give up. Give your desires and requests to the Lord. Give your situation to the Lord. We serve a God of the impossible. Sarah and Abraham gave birth to Isaac. Peter was delivered out of prison. Zacharias and Elizabeth gave birth to a son in their old age. Mary, who remained a virgin until after Jesus is born, gave birth to a Son. The Christmas season is a reminder of the miraculous intervention of God in our lives. What are you asking God for this Christmas? What situation is it that you are facing? What is a desire in your heart that seems impossible? God wants you to petition the Lord. And He wants us to ask in faith.

C. Gabriel's Discipline for Unbelief

In verses 19-22, Gabriel tells him that it is he who stands in the presence of God, and that he had been sent to give him this good news. **Gabriel is acting under authority; he has been sent by God.** He has been specifically sent by God to give Zacharias this message. Then, he tells Zacharias that he will be silent and unable to speak until these things are fulfilled. Why? Because he did not believe Gabriel's words. There are consequences to unbelief. There are consequences to the things that we do or say in life. God disciplines those whom He loves. He disciplines us so that we can mature and grow in our faith. Zacharias was not going to forget this lesson.

(Luke 1:19-20) "The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. {20} "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

Sure enough, when Zacharias went out from the temple, he was unable to speak. The people realized that he had seen a vision, but he was unable to tell them about it. He kept making signs, and remained mute.

(Luke 1:21-22) "The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. {22} But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute."

3. Zacharias' Return Home

When Zacharias had completed his priestly service, he went back home. Then, according to the word given to him by Gabriel, Elizabeth became pregnant. She kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men." I want us to take a look at their attitude about children.

(Luke 1:23-25) "When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. {24} After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, {25} "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."

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In those days, it was a disgrace not to have children. It was also honorable and a sign of blessing to have children. People have often asked us why we had so many children. I have given them three specific reasons. First, the Scriptures say that children are a blessing of the Lord. Why would I want to purposely cut off the blessings of God in my life. Who am I to tell God what blessings He can give me and which ones I will not accept? If children are a blessing, and they are, I need to treat them as blessings. They are not trouble makers. They are not inconvenient. They are not curses, but blessings. In fact, Psalm 128 tells how a man who fears the Lord will be blessed. His wife will be like a fruitful vine and his children shall be like olive plants around the table. I want to be a man who fears the Lord, and I want to be a man who is blessed by the Lord.

(Ps 128:1-4) "How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. {2}
When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you. {3}
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table. {4} Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD.

Second, God is our provider. He is Jehovah Jireh. I cannot say that I cannot afford children. God promises to provide for all my needs, and He has always done that. Therefore, Karen and I have not limited the number of children we have based on my ability to provide. My job is to work hard and to trust God for our provision. I love what David says in the Psalms. He said, "I have been young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread." I concur with that. I have been through some tight spots, but God has always been faithful.

(Ps 37:25) "I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread."

The third reason that I give people is really a response to the question that Karen and I have both been asked by a lot of people. They say, "how do you do it? We can barely handle one." We can do it because God says that His grace is sufficient for us. (See 2 Cor 12:9) He promises to give grace.

(2 Cor 12:9 "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

Today, we look at our own ability and our bank account. We look at our own selfish plans for our lives, and if children are going to disrupt our plans, then we hold off on children. We look at children as expensive inconveniences that are a lot of trouble. We see children as a mistake for not using birth control. We see children as revealing. They reveal our fornication and adultery. Therefore, we use birth control, and we abort babies every twenty seconds in America. The value of children has greatly decreased. Our attitude as a culture has shifted significantly.

Zacharias and Elizabeth had the right attitude towards children. They saw children as desirable. They saw children as a blessing. They had petitioned the Lord for a son, and now the Lord was answering their prayer. They were excited about this birth announcement.

God was excited about this announcement also. John was going to be the forerunner to His Son. John was going to prepare the way of the Lord. John was going to preach repentance and proclaim the kingdom of God. God was pretty excited about redeeming mankind, and giving us a new covenant.

Conclusion (Lessons to be Learned)

1. **One of the best things that you can provide for your children is a godly heritage.** Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous parents. Live an upright and blameless life. **Live with integrity.** It will be a blessing to your children.
2. **Pray expectantly.** Don't be surprised when God answers your prayers. It may not be when you expect it, but expect Him to answer.
3. **Seek the Lord for direction, purpose and calling for your children.** Children, involve your parents in seeking direction in life. Very often He will speak through your parents.
4. **Learn to value children. See children as blessings.** Zacharias and Elizabeth valued children. They petitioned for children, just as our church has been praying for families and children. See children as blessings. Be willing to invest your time, energy, and lives into the blessings that God brings us. You may be older, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, but they were still petitioning God for children. They were still willing to accept responsibility. They still wanted God's blessing of children.

Introduction (Rev 5:11, Col 4:14, John 13:35, Acts 23:26, 24:3, 26:25)**1. John's Heritage** (Luke 1:5-7, 1 Chron 24:1-19)

- Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of _____.
- Children of the righteous are _____. (Pro 20:7)

2. Gabriel's Visit with Zacharias

- Zacharias was chosen by _____. (Luke 1:8-9, Pr 18:18, Pr 16:33)
- Matthias was numbered among the _____ by lot. (Acts 1:21-26)

A. Gabriel's message to Zacharias (Luke 1:8-17, Ex 30:8, Dan 8:16-17)

- Incense is symbolic of _____. (Ps 141:2, Rev 5:8)
- Godly elders must be _____ and people of _____. (Rev 5:8, Acts 6:4)
- Gabriel tells Zacharias that his _____ had been heard. (Luke 1:13)
- Childbirth is something to _____ about. (Luke 1:14)
- John was going to be _____ in the sight of the Lord. (Luke 1:15-17)
- Life begins at _____, not at delivery. Babies in the womb have a _____, _____, and _____. (Luke 1:44)

B. Zacharias' response (Luke 1:18)

- Zacharias responds with _____. (Luke 1:18, Acts 12:5-16)
- Zacharias had petitioned the Lord for a _____. (Gen 18:11-14)

C. Gabriel's Discipline for Unbelief (Luke 1:19-22)

- Gabriel is acting under _____; he had been sent by God.

3. Zacharias' Return Home (Ps 128:1-4, 37:25, 2 Cor 12:9)

- Zacharias and Elizabeth had the right _____ towards children. (Luke 1:23-25)

Conclusion (Lessons to be Learned)

1. One of the best things that you can provide for your children is a godly _____. Live with _____.
2. Pray _____.
3. Seek the Lord for _____, _____, and _____ for your children.
4. Learn to _____ children. See children as _____.

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