

## ***God Opens Lips***

St. Luke 1:57-80

With our reading from St. Luke this evening, there are a lot of questions. There are questions in the text itself. What does Zechariah want this child to be called? Why does fear come upon all their neighbors? And, “what then will this child be?”

Of course, I have questions of my own – and maybe you do to. My first question is – was Mary there for the birth (the “birthday party”) and the circumcision of Elizabeth’s son? St. Luke tells us that Mary goes to visit when Elizabeth is in her sixth month – and she “remained with her about three months and returned to her home.”

Now, the way it’s all laid out, it seems Mary has gone home already. But the text doesn’t specifically say that. It’s interesting to ponder if Mary is still there – and if she is still there – who else is there?

My other question is this – how does Elizabeth know that her child is to be named John? It’s a little like Eve in the garden, when the serpent asks a question of her. How does Eve know if God said they were not to eat of the fruit of that tree? She wasn’t even created yet, when God said this to Adam.

So also here. The angel Gabriel tells Zechariah while he is in the temple. Elizabeth wasn’t there to hear the message of the Lord.

There are two logical answers for both Eve and Elizabeth. It could be that God told them also but doesn’t record that for us in Holy Scripture. Or (and I think this is the better answer), Adam and Zechariah told their wives what the Lord had said. Of course, Zechariah is mute, unable to speak, when he comes out of the temple.

Questions often raise uncertainty – and if one thing is FOR CERTAIN – God is not a God of doubt. He gives us certainty regarding those things He desires us to know and believe. And here in our text – though full of questions – there IS certainty. This is not by happenstance – this is all according to God’s plan, His prophecy, and His timing.

Galatians 4:4 says – “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

Well, it's NOT time for Jesus to be born yet – but IT IS time for John the Baptist to be born. The forerunner must come before the Christ comes – he has to prepare the way of the Lord.

“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.” That is not just a biological statement – that her pregnancy had come full term, and that her body started having contractions because it was time for this baby to be born --- more than anything, it is a theological statement!

God says its time! This is the time He has appointed for the forerunner to come forth to prepare the way of the Lord. He is the Creator – He is the One who began this life in Elizabeth's womb – and He says it is time for her son to be born.

“And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to [Elizabeth], and they rejoiced with her.” Again, this is all according to God's plan. The angel Gabriel said to Zechariah in the temple – “You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth ...”

I'm curious – are Mary, and Jesus, included in those “relatives” who rejoiced with her?

It's now the 8<sup>th</sup> day. That is NOT by coincidence. It wasn't the first day that opened up on their calendars so that family could gather for the Rite of Circumcision. Again, it's theological. God's says THIS is the day for the circumcision and naming of their son.

The planning for this goes all the way back to Creation – where the 8<sup>th</sup> day is the eternal day. No more “evening and morning” – just an eternal day – an eternity for man to live in communion with God.

When God makes His covenant with Abram, He chooses the 8<sup>th</sup> day for circumcision. Circumcision is a sign of the covenant – God's promise – that all people would be blessed through Abram. It's the promise of the Messiah, the Savior.

In circumcision the foreskin is removed – a cutting off of the flesh that shows the removal of the sinful nature. Circumcision is what made one to be an Israelite – the Lord promising to be your God, and that you are His child.

And with the circumcision, the naming of the child. The Lord gave Abram a new name at his circumcision – “Abraham,” which means, “the father of a multitude of nations.” Just as the Lord named His Creation, and Abraham – so in circumcision He names His child.

Circumcision is the precursor to the New Testament’s Baptism. In Baptism one is born again – he is a “new creation.” It is the cutting off of sin – the death of the sinner and the resurrection of the new man who lives by faith in God and His promises.

Notice, it is not Zechariah who names the child. It’s not even Elizabeth who gives the name. It is the Lord who names him John. No doubt, Zechariah the mute told Elizabeth this via a “writing tablet” during the time of her pregnancy – and now, they both confess what the Lord has spoken – “His name is John.”

At the circumcision and naming of John – there is another REcreation. It is as if Zechariah’s mouth has been recreated! “And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.”

Once again the priest can talk! His unbelief was silenced – and now faith is given a voice! “O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall declare your praise!”

In this Season of Advent we have seen that the Lord speaks His Word to a priest, and to a Virgin – breathing His promise of life into them – and they, in turn, speak forth His praise. “Let it be unto me according to your word” Mary declares. “My soul magnifies the Lord” is her song. And now, finally, in due time – Zechariah bursts forth in song. Zechariah’s song is the Benedictus in which he blesses God.

In the Benedictus, the spotlight is on God – not Zechariah, and not even on John the Baptist. Filled with the Holy Spirit – Zechariah points us to the Lord who has blessed us in many and various ways.

The Lord has “visited and redeemed His people.” Jesus has visited Zechariah’s house while in the womb of the Virgin. Zechariah’s mouth has been redeemed – his tongue loosed to praise God. In the same way, the blood of Jesus will redeem all people from the bondage of their sin, that they may declare His praise.

Jesus is that “horn of salvation” the John the Baptist foretold. The might and power of God to defeat the enemies of sin, death and the devil – to proclaim victory and salvation – to gather for Himself believers from all nations under the sun. That’s the promise He swore to Abraham and his descendants – which at the appointed time and place – comes to fulfillment.

Here at the birth, circumcision, and naming of John – the sun rises on the coming of the Promised Messiah, our Savior, Jesus Christ – who gives light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death – who guides your feet into the way of peace. In THESE days He does not leave you in doubt and uncertainty – but comes to you, and by His Word, gives you peace.

Peace be with you – the redeemed of the Lord – for the Lord is with you! Peace be with you – for His victory over sin, death and the devil IS yours – poured out with the Holy Spirit and water of Baptism.

Peace be with you – for He has opened your lips, that you may bless God – that you may declare His praise.

Peace be with you – until the day He has appointed – to come again, and take you to your heavenly home. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.