

*57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.*

*59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. 60 But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John." 61 And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name." 62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. 63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished. 64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God. 65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.*

This is such a simple passage of scripture this morning to exposit. This is very easy to understand and we can be confident that this is mostly just an historic account to be taken at literal face value.

And that's Luke's style. He's a historian with a story to convey. So he uses simple words. Simple to understand and then you think about what he just said and suddenly it's profound.

And that's what we have this morning. Simple events. Very common events with family and neighbors, we can picture ourselves there, and then . . . a miracle.

Well, actually 3 miracles if you're counting. This passage will include at least miracle no. 7 since Luke has begun his account. In all the ordinariness of a new life coming into the world and the joy

of well wishers and the stability of millenia of traditions, a miracle happens and suddenly there's a buzz in the place.

You went there to join in the fun and the love, and you leave saying, certainly we weren't the only ones partaking this day. God was in all of this. We'll see that play out in Luke's very ordinary non-plussed telling of this story.

*Vs. 57a Now the time had come*

Luke begins the story and already there is dual meaning. In the normal reading of the words our minds immediately go to the fact of a normal gestation period for a pregnancy. Nine months. Time was up. *Now the time had come*

But Luke's whole theme, if you've been following his unfolding of what God is doing, goes much deeper.

The nation of Israel; God's chosen nation, His chosen people, had been pregnant, waiting for the promised Messiah. They have been pregnant with the promises of the covenants of God regarding a Messiah who will be born to them. The gestation period has been 2000 years.

Through all of that long history God has been present with them. There have been prophets chosen by Him and kings. There have been periods where God did miracles.

The history of that nation, as God little by little reveals Himself to them through prophets and priests and kings, the written word has come down through them. Moses. Samuel. Elijah. Isaiah. Jeremiah. Daniel.

It's like a long pregnancy waiting for the promises. Every once in

a while a miracle, like a baby giving you a good whack from inside, letting you know, I'm here, this promise is coming.

Then, after the prophet Malachi; silence. 400 years of dreadful silence. It was like God just pulled the plug. Silence. No evidence at all. Did the baby die? What happened. It had been over 500 years since Daniel and the lions den. Shadrach Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Over 500 years since a miracle. Is the baby dead?

And then beginning with Luke's account of Zacharias, the silence is broken. Miracles are coming fast and furious. The baby isn't dead. The miracles and visits from angels are like birth pangs. This baby's going to come.

And Luke is a master of his craft when he playfully says; *Now the time had come*

Of course he's talking about Elizabeth and this miracle child to a barren childless couple who are probably pushing 70 years old. But there is the deeper meaning.

Israel, after a 2000 year pregnancy, is about to give birth to the Messiah! The long silence is broken. The birth pangs are coming fast.

An angel visits Zacharias. Out of nowhere, an angel appears. He tells Zacharias that him and his barren wife are going to have a child, and not just any child, the fore-runner of the messiah.

Miracle #1

Zacharias doesn't believe him and tells the angel it's impossible. And the angel makes Zacharias deaf and mute. The greek words indicate Zacharias was deaf as well as mute after he didn't believe.

Miracle #2.

Then Elizabeth conceives with Zacharias. Something they could never do in all of their youth, and long since given up on. God miraculously intervenes and opens Elizabeth's womb to conceive a child with Zacharias in their old age. First ever for them. Miracle #3

Then the angel Gabriel visits Mary in Nazareth, a young virgin, and tells her that God has chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah of Israel. With no man involved. This will be the miraculous son of God. Miracle #4

Mary conceives. She is a virgin. A virgin with a baby living inside. BIG miracle. #5 She visits Elizabeth, the only person who will believe her story, and when the baby in Elizabeth's womb hears Mary's voice, he is filled with the Spirit and leaps in Elizabeth's womb for joy. Miracle #6

So, after a 2000 year pregnancy waiting for the promised Messiah to come, and with the added severity of 400+ years of silence, suddenly the birthpangs miracles are coming rapidly to Israel. Miracle after miracle after miracle; and Luke says; *Now the time had come*

What a beautiful depth of dual meaning God gives us as He speaks through His slave, Luke.

*57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.*

Israel was very politically incorrect. A birth was a time of great joy! If the family was prominent, and I believe this family, though very ordinary, probably was, the community would come with the

musicians to celebrate a birth.

Now I told you they were politically incorrect. Because we read in history, that the musicians would come, and if it was a little girl, they wouldn't play.

I know. Not very enlightened. After 3 girls, I really didn't want any boys. I loved having girls. Still do. But in Israel, sons were a big deal. Daughters, not as much.

So, right or wrong, Luke makes a point of telling us, the celebration is ON. It's a son. Fire up the band!

*58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.*

Again, Luke downplays this. Certainly the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her with this son. And it was a miracle. Barren couple. Late 60's early 70's. A son! That's not just great mercy, it is a direct act of God. This baby is a miracle.

We can identify with this. When our girls were in the hospital and the time had obviously come, it was fun to sit in the waiting room and hallways of the hospital with joyful anticipation.

Birth is a time of rejoicing. All the ladies out there are saying, that's easy for you to say. But it's another small miracle even for them, that after the work and the pain is over, how quickly the joy comes.

Another human has been brought into the world with all of the value and dignity of that. It's a time of great rejoicing, and that's what we're seeing in Luke's account. Easy to identify with.

Notice who's not mentioned here. Yeah. Zacharias. Struck deaf and dumb. He can't hear the music. He's sort of relegated to the background. Like damaged goods. Argue with an angel and get struck dumb.

*59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.*

Circumcision was God's gift to His people Israel. It made them unique in all of the world. And we have the science now that tells us it's a much healthier situation for everybody, and also interesting, science confirms that the eighth day is when the antibodies are in place for flesh to heal quickly without infection. God's timing was perfect. Always.

Anyways it was the custom in Israel for this to happen on the eighth day and the folks who were the experts came to accomplish it, and also the son would be named at this time.

And they're going to throw poor old deaf and dumb Zacharias a bone and name the kid after him. That was more uncommon at that time than it is now. It was usual in Israel to name your sons after 2nd and 3rd generation family, not the dad.

So this was supposed to cheer up Zacharias perhaps. A little unusual but a nice gesture. And confusion would be minimal since no one talks to Zach much anymore. Call the kid Zacharias and dad won't look up as if you were calling him. He can't hear.

*60 But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John."*

Did anybody ask Elizabeth what she wanted to name the kid. No. Friends and relatives being helpful. We'll call him Zacharias after his dad, but Elizabeth puts her foot down.

No indeed. Not just no, but NO, this will not be happening. Her answer was a strong Greek emphatic, **absolutely not!** Her vote is final and she says it loud enough to trump all the other voices in the room. *"No indeed; but he shall be called John."*

*61 And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name."* This is highly irregular. John? Where'd that come from. You don't have any John's.

You'll recall the angel Gabriels words to Zacharias; *"Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you will give him the name John and you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth."*

Elizabeth and Zacharias are suffering the consequences of crossing this angel once. Zacharias hasn't said a word since he got home. He can't. So they're not going to cross him twice. That angel told us what the name was going to be, and Elizabeth is adamant, "he shall be called John".

That's where it came from. But it's just weird to all the friends and neighbors.

In Israel, there was more to a name than sound waves that single out people with that name. The names meant things.

For instance Saul or Samuel meant "asked for". Hannah had asked for a son and named him Samuel. Elijah meant Jehovah is my God.

And it's fun to quickly look at the sequence of the names in Luke's story and what the meanings were. We'll see how in God's providence, the name John was sequentially perfect.

John is the contracted version of jehohanon. Jeho for Jehovah and hanon means gracious. John means God is gracious.

God's whole plan of redemption is reflected in the names of the players in this first chapter of Luke. First, Zachariah, which means "God remembers His promise." And God long ago had made a promise of a Messiah, of a Lamb, of a sacrifice, of a Savior. Elizabeth means "God is the absolute faithful one." God will keep that promise. John means "God is gracious." We did nothing to deserve God's good gifts. And Jesus means "Jehovah saves." The whole gracious purpose of redemption unfolds in the names.

Elizabeth says absolutely not, his name shall be called John, and the friends and neighbors are sort of stumped by that. Where did you get John? So they figure they'll go over her head and see what Zacharias says, or in this case writes, since he can't speak

*62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.*

Another reason we think Zacharias was both deaf and mute. The word that describes his issue is sipa, and everywhere else that word is used, the description is of a deaf mute person. So it makes sense that Zacharias was not just unable to speak, he's also unable to hear.

That's why they made signals. Primitive sign language. What do you want his name to be Zach? Your vote trumps your wife's. I know, politically incorrect. Again. We're going for Zacharias. What do you say?

*63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John."*

A tablet would have been a flat wood piece that had something like wax that you could make smooth and then sort of carve your message in the wax. Which explains the brevity.

Zacharias is succinct. HIS NAME IS JOHN (Not going to mess with that angel twice. He got the message. Everything the angel said had come true.

*"Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you will give him the name John and you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth."*

Elizabeth had a son. There was great joy and gladness at the birth both for the parents and for the well wishers. And for us. The story of the fore-runner of the Saviour of the world still brings us joy.

One final thing. *and you will give him the name John Done!*  
*63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished.*

Astonished. One of Luke's favorite words. I used to love to listen to Alister Begg with his scottish accent, he would say *highly irregular*

We in our current vernacular might say weird.

Everything about this story is astonishing. Out of the ordinary. Highly irregular. Maybe even weird. The family and friends are astonished. Both parents are insisting on a name that isn't a family name. But they're about to be even more astonished.

Because this final obedience in insisting on a name no one expected has an astonishing result from God.

*64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.*

That little term *at once*, is also a favorite of Luke. And usually when Luke says that, you can be sure a miracle is about to happen. That's his little lead in.

*at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.*

Miracle #7. It was a miracle when the angel struck him dumb. And it's a miracle when God opens his mouth again to speak and I'm very sure, his ears to hear.

I'm sure joy was turned at that moment into GREAT joy, just as the angel predicted. Zach is back! Whoa!

*65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.*

People talk. When God is at work doing stuff, word gets out.

A sense of awe had fallen on these folks. God had been silent. A long dreadful silence. But now God is moving amongst His chosen people.

Notice their question. *"What then will this child turn out to be?"*

Zacharias is going to answer their questions. We will tackle his astonishing answer next week.

Zacharias is quite the theologian. He is going to answer not only their question but he's going to talk about how the child will be connected to the messiah of Israel who will ultimately be the answer, the reality, the coming true of all of the covenants of God with His chosen people Israel, and beyond Israel, to the nations.

All of the nations of the world will be blessed in this child that John will be the forerunner of. Pinch yourselves. Here we are. And Gabriel and Zacharias and Elizabeth and little baby John, all had an important role in our being here today.

But just to bring things to a more meaningful application I want to get real practical for our final minutes.

On Thursday night your board of directors met and we discussed our off again on again Sunday School situation.

As your shepherd, I am to be blamed for some problems that are getting pretty obvious. But first of all, the ladies who give so selflessly and the children are terrific. But we're seeing a pattern that isn't right and in order to be obedient to the book we have to re-group and do things perhaps a little differently.

By doing the Sunday school at the same time as this service, the ladies who are diligent with the kids are not being fed the word of God on a regular basis. Sunday school is kind of all they do. They don't get to hang out with the rest of the body and grow in the word.

And the question came up, is it biblical for our teachers to not really be involved with the rest of this body of believers? And the

answer is no. In fact our own little constitution for this church says that the teachers need to be regular attenders, and the way it's set up, that's really impossible.

So we've got to make some changes.

Our little Sunday school was started by MaryAnn who had a heart for her own grandchildren. But one problem we have is that having them meet during the teaching segment in here is not a good situation for the teachers. MaryAnn wasn't getting fed the word in here because she was always over there.

Then a couple of other dear ladies stepped up who were bringing kids, and are doing the best they can to help out. Ashley and Brittany. And we're thankful for them.

Whatever it is we decide to do to try to solve the problem, we need to do it carefully so that no ones feelings are hurt. Especially the kiddo's.

Those little girls that always give Carl a hug whenever they're here . . the 36 kids that went to Sierra Bible camp from here . . MaryAnn's grandkids, all of them, even some of the Vacation Bible School kids that we never get to see again for another year, ask any of them, and they will tell you, this is their church.

That's a fragile little flower and however we handle our shortcomings, we need to do it so that those kids still consider this church, their church.

We'll have some meetings and move slow and carefully.

The deeper wound is that we've lost a whole generation. Gen X Gen Y, Millenials, gen Z which should be in Sunday school,

they're all missing. The generation that has kids that are Sunday school age are missing. Those folks are not in church.

Even for quasi-religious younger people, and there are a handful, church is optional, and getting involved in ministering to this body is completely out of the question.

That doesn't square with this book. Real Christians find real body's of believers to belong to and I would also add, real believers have a real hunger for this book. Baby's need to be fed. Children need to be fed. Every one who claims to belong to Jesus needs to be fed from this book. That is normative.

So where has the younger generation gone? Why aren't they here? I believe the answer is partially in our text we studied this morning.

*65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.*

The only thing that will draw our current younger generation back into this church is what we just read.

When God is at work in the midst of His people, and things are happening that could not happen unless He did it, when that becomes a reality for a body of believers, word gets out, and people get drawn in.

The people in the hill country of Judea were all abuzz about what? Well, it was pretty obvious, God was doing stuff. Things were happening that were well out of the accepted norms. God was at work in their midst and everyone in the region was talking about it.

If God begins to do a real work in our midst, and word gets out, and young people who are getting their needs met here come and bring children, the natural outpouring will be a healthy Sunday School department that meets the biblical qualifications to do that.

I can't make that happen. Only God can do the kind of things in our midst that would be worth talking about, worth finding out about. All I can do is pray for that outcome. And wait. And I'm asking each of you to pray for that too. Call it revival if that makes you happy. I call it normal christianity.

But that's the only formula that I believe can work. Pragmatism is pumping up a church like a balloon with programs and gadgets to get people to come, even though God isn't there. I've watched that all my life after I left California. Who needs the Holy Spirit. We can do this. Change up the music. Get some fog machines. Get some big screens. Download some awesomeness. Preach less. Fog more.

I've got no stomach for that. Either God builds the real thing, or we keep bumping along just the way we are. I plan to be faithful to study and teach this book the best I can. I'm not going anywhere, unless you all get tired of waiting and run me off. That's really all I can do. For now we wait patiently to see what God will do in our midst.

And we work hard to do whatever it is we do, in obedience to biblical patterns.