

Birth of the 'Voice'
Luke 1:5-23, 57-66

December 8, 2013

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^A 1 Samuel 2:2, 3:1

^B Malachi 3:1, 2 Peter 3:9

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A. Introduction

1. Samuel

- a. I have had occasion to tell the story of Samuel's birth a number of times this fall
 - (A) to the Awana clubs, both the younger and older children
 - (1) for which it is very suitable, showing that God can use even the youngest child to serve Him and achieve His purposes
 - (2) that God is Holy, unique, a Rock: "No one is holy like the Lord, For there is none besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God." (1 Samuel 2:2 NKJV) was a verse the clubbers learned
 - (3) a verse spoken by His mother, Hannah, that would have helped the young boy, Samuel, when he was living far away from her
 - (B) and to the residents at Cobblestone
 - (1) where it is also so suitable, for it shows that God hears and answers even the most personal prayers of His people
 - (2) that those who are considered worthless by those around them or even by themselves are not worthless in God's eyes
- b. one verse is to be noted in those early years of Samuel, a verse that explains the purpose for which he was born: "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord before Eli. And word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent." (1 Samuel 3:1)
 - (A) Samuel was to be God's servant
 - (B) but also, Samuel was to be God's spokesman
 - (C) for this was a time of silent years; years when God seldom spoke

2. Silent Years

- a. that too was the situation in the story beginning in Luke 1:5
- b. Luke is a gospel of stories; real life and death stories, not just parables
- c. we had one in the Adult Bible class today, the rich man and Lazarus
- d. check it out these stories yourself as you read through Luke

- e. we are looking at some of these stories in our pre-Christmas messages
- f. today's story marks the culmination of about 400 years when God had been silent since the time of Malachi
 - (A) no prophet had addressed Israel with "Thus saith the Lord"
 - (B) God's hand had been remarkably absent from helping His people
 - (C) except where ignored by Syria, Greece & Rome for about eighty years of nominal independence they had been ruled by foreigners
 - (D) in those 80 years they wasted themselves in civil wars and strife
- g. God in His silence seemed so far away
- h. the closing promises of the OT appeared but a hollow mockery: "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 3:1) Where was he?
- i. but as 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)
- j. and with today's story, that silence is suddenly shattered by God
- k. follow along as we look at the passage we have already read

B. Zacharias' Big Week Luke 1:5-23

1. The Character of the Couple (5-7)

- a. 'Herod, King of Judea' is the first of the story's cast of characters
 - (A) of this Herod, the historian Will Durant wrote, 'His character was typical of an age that had produced so many men of intellect without morals, ability without scruples, and courage without honour.'
 - (B) he had 10 wives – at one time 9 together – executed his Jewish wife Mariamne, as well as three sons – Alexander, Aritobolus, and Antipater – as being threats to his power
 - (C) on coming to the throne as a Roman appointee, the Sanhedrin said they could not have him as a Gentile rule over them – he executed them and replaced them with men he could bend to his wishes

- (D) so it came about that in Herod's time, for the most part the priests were political sycophants ('toadies'), rather than godly men
- b. 'a certain priest named Zacharias' – "Yah will remember"
 - (A) a descendant not only of the tribe of Levi, but of the family of Aaron and so qualified to be a priest – but how different a priest from so many of his fellows
 - (B) as a priest he was permitted to marry any unmarried woman of his tribe, Levi, or in addition, any widow of a priest
 - (C) but his marriage was special, to the daughter of a priest, one that could fully sympathise with him in his position
- c. 'her name was Elizabeth' – 'My God's Oath'
 - (A) together their names say, Yah remembers His oath, His promise
 - (B) despite such a privileged a marriage and names, they would have seemed being punished by God, 'because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years'
 - (C) but in the face of this, we read rare words accorded to this couple
- d. 'they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.'

2. The Course of Abijah (8-10)

- a. in the days of David the priests were divided into 24 groups, with each group in its turn serving in the temple
- b. Zacharias was of the eighth course or division, so for a eight-day period – Sabbath to Sabbath – in about mid-May, and again in mid-November he would be called to Jericho to wait or to Jerusalem to serve
- c. but there were so many priest – the estimates range from 16,000 to 24,000 – that not every one would actually serve in the temple
- d. the ones to go were chosen by lot, and the rule was that no man could serve twice – and many would never get to serve
- e. this year, the lot and the privilege fell to Zacharias – God remembered
- f. his part in the service was the burning of incense at the hour of prayer
- g. a brief service from which the crowd praying outside awaited him

h. but this time something happened that was not on the schedule

3. The Coming of Gabriel (11-17)

a. angels do not always reveal their true nature when they appear

(A) Hebrews 13:2 (AV) says, 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'

(B) but when they do show their nature, there can be no mistaking the fact, and the natural response is the same as Zacharias', fear

(C) so Zacharias had no reason to doubt this messenger of God

b. the messenger's message, however, was incredulous

(A) not that Zacharias had been making this petition for a child, that was a natural cry from his and Elizabeth's hearts

(B) not that God had heard the prayer

(C) but that God was answering yes, even at their advanced years

(D) and above this was all the specifics of the child to come

(1) the name of the child was given: John, that being the English rendition of the Greek name which in Hebrew was Jehonan, or its longer form, Jehohonan – Yah is gracious

(2) he was to be a Nazirite for life, set apart for God

(3) he was to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit even before birth

(4) he was the 'messenger of the covenant' that Malachi foretold

(5) he was the forerunner to the promised Messiah!

4. The Casting of Doubt (18-23)

a. this was incredible news, but it should have filled his heart with 'joy and gladness' even as the angel said – but did he believe?

b. no ... he had to have a sign: 'How shall I know this? For I am an old man ...' and so also Elizabeth – Pastor John Piper preached a sermon on this with the title, "How Not to Talk to an Angel!"

c. the angel, Gabriel, gives him four reasons he should have believed

(A) his name was Gabriel – God's man (in the sense of mighty person)

- (B) his place was in God's presence
- (C) his mission was from God to Zacharias
- (D) his message was good news
- d. then, to this he gives the sign that Zacharias asks – the priest is stricken voiceless and will be so until the promise he doubts is fulfilled
- e. so it came to pass: he was mute and instead of blessing the awaiting crowd outside the temple, he could only make signs to them
- f. we shall omit the intervening story of Mary, and skip ahead to ...

C. The Naming of the Child Luke 1:57-66

1. The People's Suggestion (57-59)

- a. in the eighth day of a male Jewish child, he is circumcised and named
 - (A) today this responsibility falls upon the mohel, ("one circumcising") a man or woman trained both religiously and medically to carry this out ... sometimes the person is also a qualified doctor
 - (B) but historically, it was usually done by the child's father, perhaps his mother or some other member of the family
 - (C) it was a time of remembering and reaffirming the covenant that God made with Abraham, of being God's special people
 - (D) it was also at a family gathering, a celebration, a time of rejoicing
 - (E) it was also a noisy time – like a baby shower – everyone talking at once and giving their opinions on the child and current events
 - (F) that is the picture that lies before us in these verses
- b. so, when the time for naming comes up, the family has their say
 - (A) naturally he will be called Zacharias; that's a good priestly name
 - (B) that's his father's name; no further discussion, except ...

2. The Parents' Statement (60-63)

- a. 'No indeed; but he shall be called John.'
- b. not 'God will remember' but 'God IS gracious'

- c. then, as often happens in family gatherings of this sort, things became a little humorous
- (A) there is the voice of the family: "John? Elizabeth, no one in your family is called John! What in the world are you thinking of?"
 - (B) there is Zacharias himself standing helplessly by, speechless
 - (C) so they turn to him – forgetting that while he may not be able to speak, he can certainly hear ... and just trying to put in a word –and make signs to him seeking his input (you may have seen a similar thing happen when people talk to someone who stutters – they slow down their speech and enunciate every word clearly as though that person couldn't hear! It isn't hearing that is his or her problem!)
 - (D) well, his ability at making signs appears to have become quite good over the past 9 months and he asks and gets a tablet
 - (E) on which he writes, 'His name IS John' – he is already named, by Gabriel, by God Himself; and with this,

3. Zacharias' Silence Ended (64-66)

- a. his silence is shattered in joy by God
- b. his tongue erupts in praise of God
- c. those in the gathering feared – fell into awe at these events
- d. the news of this event was scattered over Judea's hill country
- e. the importance of God's intervention after 400 years of silence was in their thoughts: "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." (Luke 1:66)
- f. the balance of this chapter, which is Zacharias' hymn of praise, we shall not look at this morning, except to mention three truths therein
 - (A) verses 67-18, God has visited His people, shattering the silence
 - (B) verses 69-75, God's salvation is now close at hand
 - (C) verses 76-80, this child, John, is the herald of the Saviour Lord

D. Conclusion

1. In Zacharias' Time

- a. the Jewish nation was in a dismal state, ruled by a corrupt king
- b. the religious rulers had as their main interest not causing dissension – not rocking the boat – so as to hold onto their power and position
- c. the common people were in despair
- d. 'where is the long ago promised Messiah?'
- e. 'God has not spoken for centuries'
- f. then God shattered the silence announcing the birth of John
- g. John, who would be the forerunner, preparing the way for Christ

2. In Our Time

- a. a further 2000 years have passed
- b. of Christ scoffers ask, 'Where is the promise of His coming?'
- c. much of the visible Christian church is in disarray – there is little, if any thing, to distinguish it from the unbelieving world
- d. dismay, despair, discouragement attack believers, let alone the lost
- e. yet Jesus said, "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (Luke 7:28)
- f. you as God's children, indwelt by His Holy Spirit, are the Zachariases, Elizabeths and John the Baptists of this age
- g. at this Christmas season, while hearts are open to listen, by your lives and lips shatter the silence, so the wondrous message of the gospel may be heard in the world of your family, friends and acquaintances

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ASV American Standard Version of 1901
AV Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EGT – *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton
Gill – *Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament*, by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.
RWP – *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson