

This lesson continues to follow the birth of John the Baptist, a miracle considering the advanced age of his parents. Friends and family were amazed at John's circumcision when both parents insisted that the child would be named John, which was in obedience to God's instructions sent through an angel (Luke 1:13). When Zacharias' ability to speak was restored, he immediately began praising God.

Verses 1:26-56: Six months after Zacharias' wife, Elisabeth, became pregnant, the same angel that visited Zacharias in the temple (vs. 11-20) was sent by God to Nazareth to visit a young virgin girl that was engaged to marry a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of David. The angel declares to her that she will bear a son and that she should name the child Jesus, a name that means "Savior." The Holy Ghost would cause her to become pregnant with a holy child that would be described as the Son of God. The angel informs her that Elisabeth was also going to have a son at her advanced age and was already six months into her pregnancy.

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. 58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

A pregnancy at Elisabeth's age could be problematic, so when she came to full term and the child was born, her friends and family rejoiced with her because of the successful delivery. They also rejoiced because God had showed mercy to Elisabeth by giving her a child, since being unable to bear children was an embarrassment to a woman in that day.

59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. 60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. 61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

"And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child" – The Mosaic Law required that male children be circumcised eight days after their birth (Lev 12:1-3).

"and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father" – It had become customary to name a male child at his circumcision and the friends and family assumed that the parents would follow the custom of naming sons after a respected family member. They took it upon themselves to name the child after his father.

"And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John" – Zacharias had obviously informed Elisabeth of what the angel had said and that the child's name should be "John." Knowing this, she interrupts the attempt to name the child and insists that the name of this child will be "John."

"And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name" – These friends and family could not understand why Elisabeth would violate the custom and give the child a unique name that was not already being used in the family line.

62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. 63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. 64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

"And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called" – Perhaps because Zacharias had not been able to speak for nine months the people must have assumed that he was deaf as well because they made hand gestures to ask Zacharias what name he wanted to give to his son. They likely thought that Zacharias would correct his wife and would want the child named after himself or some other respected family member.

"And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all" – When Zacharias confirmed the name that his wife had said, the people were amazed. Apparently it was a big deal to follow the custom of naming your children after family members because they were surprised at the name that Zacharias and Elisabeth were insisting to give to their son.

"And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God" – Just as the angel had said, John's inability to speak would continue "until the day that these things shall be performed" (v. 20). Apparently the performance of these things was completed as soon as they gave the child the name specified by the angel. Zacharias was able to speak again once both he and his wife had obeyed by giving the name to their son. The first words that came out of his mouth were words of praise for God. Verses 67-79 likely quote these words of praise.

65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. 66 And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

"And fear [terror; reverence] came on all that dwelt round about them:" – The word "fear" can mean mean "reverence," which is the most likely meaning in this context. The people of the town where Zacharias and Elizabeth lived recognized that the hand of God was at work concerning their son.

"and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea" – The news concerning John's birth and the things that were said about him (the discussion of what John's name should be as well as Zacharias' prophesy in vs. 67-79) spread beyond the the couple's town throughout Judea.

"And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be!" – Everyone who heard these things realized that God was doing something special and wondered what plans He had for this child.

"And the hand of the Lord was with him" – God guided John's growth into adulthood so that he would become the man that God intended.

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, 68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, 69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

“And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying” – The Spirit of God filled Zacharias and inspired him to speak the words of praise quoted in vs. 68-79. Under the Spirit’s inspiration, he recognized the significance of John’s birth as the forerunner of the Messiah, which meant that the salvation promised to Israel through the Messiah was on the horizon.

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people” – Zacharias praised the God of Israel because He was keeping the promise He had made of redeeming Israel. This this redemption would come through Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. John’s birth as the Messiah’s forerunner was evidence of this.

“And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” – A horn was a symbol of strength, so a “horn of salvation” expressed the power of the salvation that God was bringing to Israel. This horn would not come through John the Baptist, who was of the tribe of Levi, but through a descendant of David, who was of the royal tribe of Judah. This descendant, as God promised David, would sit on the throne over Israel forever (Psa. 89:3-4; Isa. 11:1-9; Jer. 23:5-6). This promised descendant is Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: 71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

God has promised through multiple OT prophets that He would rescue Israel from their enemies and make them the dominant nation on earth. These promises will be fulfilled during Christ’s millennial kingdom on earth as He rules from Jerusalem. One such prophecy was given in **Isa. 14:1-3** (*“For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors. And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve”*).

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

Zacharias praises God for keeping the promises and covenants that He has made with the nation of Israel, beginning with Abraham and continuing throughout Israel’s history.

73 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, 74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

God promised that He would bless and multiply Abraham’s descendants, give them victory over their enemies and that the nation of Israel would be a blessing to the entire world: **Gen. 22:16-18** *“And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”* God’s promises to Israel included protection from their enemies and that they would be able to live in holiness and righteousness before him (v. 71). These promises will be fulfilled in their entirety during Christ’s millennial reign.

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; 77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways” – Zacharias now addresses his son, John, and describes the role that he would play in God’s plans for the coming of the Messiah to bring salvation to Israel. John would be the forerunner of Christ, preparing the hearts of the people to receive their Messiah (Isa. 40:3-4; Mal. 4:5-6).

“To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” – John preached a message of repentance in preparation for the arrival of the kingdom of God and for people to be baptized for the remission of their sins. These things pointed to the Messiah and their purpose was to prepare the hearts of the people to receive the One Who could give them salvation.

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, 79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

It was God’s mercy that compelled Him to “visit” His people in order to illuminate their spiritual understanding so that they could find their salvation in Him and escape the sentence of death that sin had placed on them. Through this they would be led to peace with God.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

John grew up, both physically and spiritually. He spent most of his time in the desert, most likely using the seclusion to seek God’s will and to learn what he needed to know until he was ready to be revealed to Israel and commence the ministry that God gave him.