

Church Year Story 4
The Birth of John the Baptist

Catechism and Memory Verse
from the Congregation at Prayer for the Week

BIBLE STORY: THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Luke 1:57-66 (67-79) 80

Central Thoughts

- The Lord keeps His promises, in spite of our doubts and unbelief.
- John's name means the Lord is gracious.
- When Zachariah and Elizabeth named their son, they were confessing their faith in the Lord's Word.
- Zachariah's song, the Benedictus, was inspired by the Holy Spirit through the Word of the Lord that Zachariah received.
- The Benedictus gave all glory to the Lord for visiting and redeeming His people in Jesus' suffering and death upon the cross.
- Zachariah confessed in the Benedictus that the entire plan of salvation unfolded according to God's Word.

Discussion Questions

How did the neighbors and relatives respond to the news of John's birth?

They rejoiced with Elizabeth that God had shown great mercy to her in allowing her to be a mother, though she had been barren.

What does such rejoicing at the birth of a child teach us?

That life is sacred and that there is no greater calling for a woman than to be a mother

What happened on the eighth day?

John was circumcised and given his name

Why did Elizabeth insist that his name should be John?

Because this is the name given to him by the Angel Gabriel before his conception

What does the name John mean?

The Lord is gracious

What did Zachariah confess when he wrote on the tablet that his son should be named John?

That he believed the Lord's Word that He was gracious and had given him and Elizabeth this child to be the forerunner of the Christ and to prepare the way for the Lord's coming

How did those in attendance respond to Zachariah's confession?

They all marveled

What happened after Zachariah wrote John's name on the tablet?

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke praising God

With what words did Zachariah praise God?

The words of the Benedictus in verses 68-79

What was the response of the prophecy of Zachariah?

The fear of the Lord touched the hearts of those who witnessed John's birth and heard the confession of Zachariah. They kept the words of this prophecy in their hearts and they discussed all the things that happened and that were spoken about this child, wondering among themselves, "What kind of child will this be?"

What does it mean that the hand of the Lord was with John?

The Holy Spirit rested upon John from his mother's womb

According to the Benedictus, why does Zachariah bless the Lord?

Because the Lord had visited and redeemed His people.

When would this redemption happen, yet how does Zachariah speak of it?

The redemption of His people would take place through Jesus death upon the cross, yet Zachariah speaks of it as if it had already taken place.

According to the Benedictus, what gave Zachariah the certainty of this salvation?

God's Word, which he had previously doubted

How many different words or phrases in the Benedictus refer to the Word of God?

"As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets...to perform the mercy promised...and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham..."

According to the Benedictus, what would be the purpose of John's ministry?

"To prepare [the Lord's] way, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins...to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Meditation on the Bible Story

God's Word is true and the Lord is faithful to His promises, even if we doubt them. In spite of Zachariah's doubt at the announcement of John's birth, the Lord kept His promise and showed Himself to be "the Lord who is gracious" (a reference to John's name) in giving Zachariah and Elizabeth the son who would be the forerunner of the Christ. The neighbors and relatives rejoiced at John's birth. There is no greater calling or privilege for a woman than to become a mother. The birth of this child was a sign of the Lord's graciousness to sinners, which began with John's own parents and would extend to all who would hear John preach. For nine months Zachariah had been unable to speak, but now, by the Word of the Lord that he had previously doubted, the Lord opened his heart and he confessed his faith. "O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare Your praise" (Psalm 51:15). Zachariah's confession of faith and song of praise was inspired by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God that Zachariah had previously heard. The confession of Zachariah and the fulfillment of the Lord's Word in the birth and naming of John caused the people to marvel, fear the Lord, and discuss throughout all the hill country of Judea the things that they had heard and seen. Like Mary, the people who heard the wonderful works of God, "kept them in their hearts" and wondered what kind of child he would be. Their question and meditation upon God's Word would be answered in the ministry of John the Baptist who would prepare the Lord's way, giving the "knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins."

Prayer on the Bible Story

Most gracious God and Father, we give thanks to You for keeping Your promise to Zachariah in spite of his doubt and unbelief. You gave him a son and kept your Word. As you prepared the way for Jesus' coming through the preaching of John the Baptist, prepare our hearts to receive Him and by Your holy Word take away all doubt and unbelief from us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



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