

CALVARY CHAPEL OF PHILADELPHIA

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY
3RD-5TH GRADE
TEACHER'S PACKET

SUNDAY MORNING

Study 1

The Birth of John the Baptist



The Birth of John the Baptist

The Objective is the key concept for this week's lesson. It should be the main focus of the study.

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verses support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the "reward box" found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

Objective To begin the study of the Gospel of Luke by examining the birth of John the Baptist.

Key Verses

Luke 1:5-25, 57-80—Main Teaching Passage

Memory Verse - John 1:6-7

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe."

Hook

As a class, review 1 Corinthians 9:24.

Tell the class to all cover their ears, as you are going to sit in silence for a minute. Try to have them sit in silence for as long as possible, a minute if you can.

Ask them what they were thinking as they sat in silence. What if they had to do that for 400 years? In today's Bible story, God is going to speak to Israel for the first time in 400 years.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

Today we begin our journey through the Gospel of Luke with the birth of John the Baptist. While Jesus is central to this Gospel, Luke thought it good first to introduce the character of John. The miraculous account of John's birth builds the expectation of this book: after almost 400 years in which Israel had not heard from the Lord, God once again was moving among His people. Zechariah was a faithful and righteous priest living in Israel, but he and his wife Elizabeth were without child. This description echoes Old Testament heroes like Sarah and Hannah, who were also childless. Zechariah entered the Holy Place, where he met the angel Gabriel who told him that his wife would conceive despite her old age. This child would be set apart for the Lord and lead to the repentance of God's people. However, because he and his wife were old, Zechariah doubted, and as a result the angel made him mute.

Months later when the baby was born, Elizabeth told her neighbors and relatives that the boy's name would be John, just as the angel had commanded. The people were confused, since no one in her family had that name, so they asked Zechariah. Zechariah was still mute, so he wrote on a tablet, "His name is John," and immediately he was able to speak again. He responded by praising the Lord. He then prophesied about his son. He acknowledged and praised the Lord for returning to visit and redeem His people. Zechariah proclaimed that John would be a prophet of the Lord that would prepare God's people for His coming. John was going to be the one to make the people of Israel's hearts ready for their coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, God's precious Son.

The interpretation/
exegesis of the passage.
What does this passage
mean? How does this
passage apply to my
life?

LOOK

The last few months, we have been looking at Old Testament examples of men and women of faith. As we move into the Gospel of Luke, we will transition from examples of faith to the ultimate object of our faith, Jesus Christ. Before Jesus, however, John the Baptist was born in order to prepare the way for Him.

Our story today begins 400 years after the end of the Old Testament. Since then, there had been no word of prophecy from the Lord. These years are known commonly as the "400 years of silence." During that time, Israel eagerly awaited the coming of their Messiah. This story is the breaking of those years of silence. For the first time since the

LOOK (Continued)

days of Malachi, God had spoken to His people. If someone were to stop talking for 400 years, whatever they said to break the silence must have been pretty important. In this case, it was that God had remembered His people and was coming to save them.

However, God's care was not just for Israel as a whole. He answered the cries of the nation of Israel, but He also heard the requests of two individual righteous people, Zechariah and Elizabeth. The Lord was beginning to enact His plan to save Israel by answering the prayers of a man and his wife who longed for a child. What a beautiful picture of God's unique care for us! He cares for the problems in our own lives just like He cares about the great and important events of the world.

Just as we saw examples of faith in Hebrews 11, we see in Zechariah both a lack of faith at first but then also an example of faith later. When God promises that He will do something, it is going to happen. At first, Zechariah doubted, and that led to him being mute. When he did express faith by stating that the boy's name would be John, his speech was restored. God was working through Zechariah and Elizabeth in order to save His people. Today, He is still working through people to enact salvation. He uses people like you and me, people who know the Lord Jesus Christ, to proclaim the message of salvation to others in faith. We can choose either to walk in faith and be used powerfully by God in His plan for salvation, or we can live in unbelief and be a hindrance to His plan. The choice is up to each one of us to show either faith or unbelief.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

TOOK

As a class, memorize John 1:6-7.

Ask the class to think about their role in God's saving plan for the world. Think of ways they can have faith in sharing the Gospel (e.g. having courage to tell friends about Jesus, etc.)

Pray: Thank the Lord for sending His Son to save us. Ask for hearts of faith to be used by God to share the wonderful news of His Son.

Parent Question: How did Zechariah show unbelief in Luke 1? How did he show faith?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Luke 1 by David Guzik

The Birth of John the Baptist

B. The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist.

1. (5-7) The time and people beginning the history of the life of Jesus.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

a. These first events happened in a certain time: **in the days of Herod**. This is the man known as *Herod the Great*, who was at the end of a long and terrible reign. Ethnically, he was not a descendant of Israel, but of Jacob's brother Esau-and Edomite, or an Idumean. He was known for his spectacular building programs, but even more so for his paranoid cruelty, which drove him to execute many, including members of his own family.

b. These first events happened to certain people: to **Zacharias** and **Elizabeth**, who were righteous and obedient, yet stigmatized with barrenness (**but they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren**).

c. **Of the division of Abijah**: Priestly divisions (including the **division of Abijah**) are noted in [1 Chronicles 23-24](#).

2. (8-10) Zacharias' temple service.

So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

a. **According to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense**: Only priests from a particular lineage could serve in the temple. Over the years the number of priests multiplied, (there were said to be as many as 20,000 priests in the time of Jesus) so they had to use the **lot** to determine which priests would serve when. The **lot** to serve in the time might fall to a priest only once in his life.

i. To a godly man like Zacharias, this would be the biggest event of his life, a tremendous privilege, a-once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Surely, Zacharias must have wondered what it would be like to enter the holy place. And he must have wondered if God has something special to communicate to him in that special event of his life.

ii. It is also easy to imagine Zacharias asking the other priests who had already burned incense before the

Lord what it was like; asking them if they had any unique spiritual experience when they were ministering before the Lord. This whole event was filled with enormous anticipation.

b. **To burn incense:** According to the Law of Moses, incense was offered to God on the golden altar every morning and every evening ([Exodus 30:7-8](#)). By this time, there was an established ritual for the practice.

i. There were several lots cast to determine who did what at the morning sacrifice. The first lot determined who would cleanse the altar and prepare its fire; the second lot determined who would kill the morning sacrifice and sprinkle the altar, the golden candlestick, and the altar of incense. The third lot determined who would come and offer incense. This was the most privileged duty; those who received the first and second lots would repeat their duty at the evening sacrifice, but not with the third lot. To offer the incense would be a once in a lifetime opportunity.

ii. Before dawn, hundreds of worshippers gathered at the temple. The morning sacrifice began when the incense priest walked toward the temple, through the outer courts, he struck a gong-like instrument known as the *Magrephah*. At this sound, the Levites assembled and got ready to lead the gathered people in songs of worship to God.

iii. The other two priests chosen by lot that morning walked up to the temple on each side of the priest chosen to offer the incense. All three entered the holy place together. One priest set burning coals on the golden altar; the other priest arranged the incense so it was ready to go. Then those two priests left the temple, and the incense priest was left all alone in the holy place.

iv. In front of him was the golden altar of incense; it was 18 inches square and 3 feet high. On that small table lay the burning coals, with little wisps of smoke rising up, ready for the incense. Behind the gold altar was a huge, thick curtain, and behind that curtain was the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place, where no man could enter, except the high priest, and that only on the Day of Atonement. As he faced the golden altar of incense, to his right would be the table of showbread, and to his left would be the golden lampstand, which provided the only light for the holy place.

c. **And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense:** When the people outside saw the two men exit the temple, they knew that the time to offer the incense had come. Those hundreds of people bowed or kneeled before the Lord, and spread their hands out in silent prayer. They knew that at that moment the incense priest prayed in the holy place, in the very presence of God, for the entire nation.

i. There followed several minutes of dead silence in all the temple precincts-as Zacharias lingered in prayer in the holy place during this, the most solemn experience of his life.

ii. The connection between the burning of **incense** and prayer might seem strange to some, but in the Bible the burning of incense is a strong picture of prayer ([Psalm 141:2](#); [Revelation 5:8](#)).

ii. What did Zacharias pray for? He must have thought about it carefully beforehand. He may have even taken out a prayer list, though it is more likely he memorized it. He also knew how long to pray, because he had attended the morning sacrifice as a worshipper many times before, and he knew how long the incense priest stayed in the temple. He must have prayed for both needs of the nation of Israel, which was occupied and oppressed by the hated Romans. He must have prayed for God to send the Messiah. He probably would have thought it wrong to throw in his personal needs at such a holy moment!

3. (11-17) The angel's announcement to Zacharias.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zach-

rias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

a. **Then an angel of the Lord appeared:** The angel simply stood **on the right side of the altar of incense**. Zacharias probably had his eyes tightly shut in passionate prayer, and when he opened them he saw this angel.

b. **When Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him:** No wonder why! The **angel** who appeared to Zacharias was not a romantic figure, or a naked baby with wings. This angel was a glorious, fearful, and an awesome creature. Like most angels in the Bible, the first thing this angel has to say to his human contact is "**Do not be afraid.**"

i. Zacharias must have thought, "Does this happen to everyone who does this? The other guys didn't tell me anything about this!"

c. **Your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear a son:** It is very doubtful that Zacharias prayed for a son when he was at the golden altar of incense. First, it might have seemed like such a "selfish" need. Second, since he and Elizabeth *were both well advanced in years* ([Luke 1:7](#)), they had probably given up on this prayer a long time ago.

i. Sometime we pray for something for a long, long time. We pray for the salvation of a spouse or a child. We pray for a calling or a ministry. We pray that God would bring that special person to us. But after years of heartfelt prayer, we give up out of discouragement. Zacharias and Elizabeth probably prayed years of passionate prayer for a son, but gave up a long time ago, and stopped believing God for so much anymore.

ii. When we are in that place, we sometimes begin - in the smallest of ways - to doubt the love and care of God for us. But God always loves, and His care never stops.

iii. Zacharias' reaction to the angel's promise was probably thinking, "I don't know what you are talking about. I didn't pray for a son. We're old, you know. I gave up on that prayer a long time ago. I'm praying for the salvation of Israel. I'm praying that God will send the promised Messiah." Zacharias didn't know that God would answer both prayers at once, and use his miracle baby to be a part of sending the Messiah!

iv. Zacharias had no idea that God would answer the two greatest desires of his heart at once. He had probably completely given up on the idea of being a dad; it was a hope that was crushed over the years of disappointment. But God hadn't given up on it, even though Zacharias and Elizabeth had.

d. **You shall call his name John:** The boy was given a name before he was even conceived. This was a command from the Lord to name the boy **John**.

e. His son John would be **great in the sight of the Lord**, and would **drink neither wine nor strong drink**, a probable reference to the vow of a Nazirite found in [Numbers 6](#). John would be specially consecrated to God all the days of his life, as Samson *should* have been.

i. Though John would be **great in the sight of the Lord**, by the grace of God, *he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he* ([Matthew 11:11](#)).

f. Most importantly, John would have a unique filling of the Holy Spirit-being **filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb**.

i. Calvin, on John being filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb: "Let us learn by this example that, from the earliest infancy to the latest old age, the operation of the Spirit in men is free."

g. His ministry would be to **turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God**. He would prepare the way of the Messiah by turning hearts to God before the Messiah came. The pattern for his ministry would be the great prophet Elijah - **will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah**. Jesus later said this was fulfilled in John ([Matthew 11:14](#) and [17:12](#)).

h. **To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children**: This quotation from [Malachi 4:5-6](#) is meaningful for more than its reference to Elijah. These were essentially the last words in the Old Testament, and now God's revelation is resuming where it had left off.

i. Elijah was a man who called Israel to a radical repentance ([1 Kings 18:20-40](#)).

4. (18-20) Zacharias' doubt and muteness.

And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

a. **How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is well advanced in years**: Zacharias' attitude was, "Thanks for the promise, angel. But knowing the condition of my wife and I, this is a big one. Can you give us a sign to prove it?"

i. It isn't that Zacharias doesn't *want* to believe this; he does. It is simply that he feels it must be too good to be true, and he has probably protected himself from disappointment by not setting his expectations too high. We rob ourselves of many a miracle by the same attitude.

ii. Zacharias looked at the circumstances first, and what God can do last; we are tempted to think this is logical; but if God is real, there is nothing logical about putting circumstances before God.

b. **I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God**: Gabriel reminds Zacharias of who *he is* and where he has come from. There is a big contrast between **I am an old man** and **I am Gabriel**-which held more weight? Gabriel also "preaches the gospel" to Zacharias (**brings you glad tidings**).

i. It was nothing but good news to Zacharias that he would not only have a son, but that the son would have a significant role in God's plan of redemption. This is the good news that Gabriel brought to Zacharias.

ii. This gives a better idea of what it really means to preach the gospel-it is to bring good news to people who need it.

c. If there is no Zacharias, there is no John the Baptist. If there is no John the Baptist, there is no herald announcing the coming of the Messiah. If there is no herald announcing the coming of the Messiah, the prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah are unfulfilled. If any of the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the first coming of the Messiah are unfulfilled, then Jesus did not fulfill all things. If Jesus did not fulfill all things, then He did not complete God's plan of redemption for you and I and we must perish in our sins! This was good news!

d. **But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak:** Zacharias paid a price for his unbelief. His unbelief did not make God take his promise back; it just kept Zacharias from enjoying it.

i. When we do not believe God's promise for our lives, we do not necessarily destroy the promise; but we do destroy our ability to enjoy the promise. What made this such a severe punishment was that Zacharias had such great news to tell.

ii. Strangely, many Christians would not consider this a punishment-they don't mind keeping quiet about the good news of Jesus.

5. (21-23) Zacharias appears to the multitude.

And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.

a. **And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long:** The custom was for the priest to come from the temple as soon as he was finished praying, to assure the people that he had not been struck dead by God. Zacharias' delay had started to make the crowd nervous.

i. After the incense priest finished, he came out of the holy place through the great doors of the temple, and met the other two priests right outside the doors. Then the incense priest raised his hands and blessed the people with the blessing from [Numbers 6:24-26](#). The hundreds of gathered worshippers knew what to do; they responded by saying, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting."

ii. After all this, the Levites got the "praise band" started. They began with a blast from special silver trumpets; then a priest struck the cymbals, and the choir of Levites began to sing the Psalm of the day. The choir was made up of not less than twelve voices, which mingled young and old for a full range of sound and probably some great harmonies.

b. **But when he came out, he could not speak to them:** When Zacharias came out, he was supposed to stand on the temple steps, overlooking the crowd, and pronounce the priestly blessing on the people ([Numbers 6:24-26](#)), and the other priests would repeat it after him. But Zacharias couldn't speak!

i. Doing the best he could through hand motions, he told the story of what happened to him in the temple. It's hard to know if everyone believed him!

6. (24-25) Elizabeth's conception and joy.

Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people."

a. **His wife Elizabeth conceived:** Zacharias had normal relations with his wife; he partnered with God to fulfill the promise. He did not count on this child coming from a miraculous conception.

b. **She hid herself five months:** Why did Elizabeth go away? Not to hide her pregnancy; she was gone for the first five months, the time when she would be least noticed as pregnant. She went away to spend time with the Lord, and to meditate on the destiny of the child within her.

E. John the Baptist's birth.

1. (57-66) The birth and naming of John the Baptist.

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father; what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

- a. **She brought forth a son:** The promise was fulfilled just as God said it would be. God always keeps His promises.
- b. **They would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias:** Both Zacharias and Elizabeth knew the name of the child had to be John, according to the command from the angel ([Luke 1:13](#)).
- c. **They made signs to his father:** They treated Zacharias as if he were deaf, not mute! This must have been constantly annoying to Zacharias.
- d. **His name is John:** Now, Zacharias responds in total faith. It isn't "I think his name should be John." For Zacharias, this was recognition of a fact, not a suggestion.
 - i. Even though he had failed before, God gave Zacharias a *second chance* at faith. He gives the same to us today.
- e. **Immediately his mouth was opened:** Just as Gabriel said, Zacharias can speak again. **He spoke, praising God.** It is fitting that Zacharias' first words were praise to God. His chastisement for disobedience hasn't made him bitter. It's made him want to trust God all the more, at every opportunity.

2. (67-80) Zacharias' prophecy.

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who *have been* since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

- a. The prophetic voice of the Lord had been silent for 400 years; it is no small thing to read **Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied** - and he now proclaims the salvation of the Messiah and His forerunner.
 - i. Zacharias' song has been called the *Benedictus*, from its first words in the Latin translation.
- b. **Has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David:** We know this is truly Spirit-

inspired prophecy because the focus of his prophecy is the unborn Jesus, not Zacharias' new son John.

i. Zacharias doesn't even *know* Jesus yet, but he praises Him, he loves Him, and he is passionate about Jesus. We know so much more about Jesus than Zacharias does, so what can excuse the coldness of our hearts?

c. **The child grew and became strong in spirit:** The promise of God came to fruition in John's life. Why was John **in the desert till the day of his manifestation**? Because that is where God has trained many of His prophets.