

A BIRTH QUESTION

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Scripture: Luke 1:57-66

I guess it comes as no surprise that all our recent scripture readings are at the very beginning of all the gospel accounts which focus on the birth of Jesus. That's what Advent is all about – remembering this beautiful time when God chose to become a human, live among us, give His life for us to make sure that we will have a pathway back to join Him in eternity. What a glorious plan!

Luke 1:57-66

When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!"

"What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." so they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way."

Shall we pray together? Almighty God, let Your Holy Spirit saturate every heart and mind that is focused on Your Word right now. Fill every room where we are in, and make something divine happen. Make Your word come alive to us in such a beautiful way that we will embrace it and that our wills would align with your will, and that heaven and earth will come together and we will be able to say, "Not my will, but Thy will has been done in my life." To that end we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

We've just read about John the Baptist's birth. A couple of weeks ago, we had a Bible study and we looked at Zechariah and Elizabeth. We looked at Zechariah getting the call to go and minister in the temple at the altar of incense, a once in a lifetime chance to be able to go and light the incense. Suddenly the angel Gabriel stands before him and tells him that his prayers are being answered. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth are going to have a child John. Zechariah asks, "How can I believe this? How do I know that this is true? Because both of us are old people."

And the angel Gabriel stands and says, "I stand in the very presence of God, and because you didn't believe this, you will not be able to speak till the time that this child is born." So, Zechariah has been mute. He has not been able to talk at all during these nine months. I wonder how things were at home – how they carried on conversations! Did he have to start signing or making gestures or writing things down for Elizabeth to be able to understand? Or maybe after so many years they just knew how to communicate with each other. But it must have been an interesting nine months.

Then the birth of John happens. We read that the neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her. Everyone was happy. That was a prophecy too, that he will bring much joy

to the people around him. And sure enough, that is what happened. Then when the baby was eight days old, as was the custom, they had to take him for circumcision. At that point, they were asked: what name shall be given? It was customary at that time, to name after the name of the father or the household. When they asked, and Elizabeth said, "We're going to call him John," it must have taken everybody by surprise. John? Wait a minute! There's no John in your lineage. What are you talking about? You've got to call him Zechariah.

Then finally they looked at Zechariah and asked him. He gestured: Let me have a tablet. So they gave him a tablet and he wrote: His name will be John! In that moment, his mouth was unstopped, and he was able to speak. "You shall call his name John" was the explicit command that the angel Gabriel brought to Zechariah, and the moment he pronounced it, he got back his speech. The bible tells us that awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it reflected on those events and asked: "What will this child turn out to be?"

Well, what kind of life was John's? what did it turn out to be? We read later on in scripture that he spent his time in the wilderness until he got the call to begin to preach. Then he began to preach a message of repentance, calling everybody to repentance. When you read some of the things that he said, it was not a sermon that would draw anybody to him. And yet, the Bible tells us that they came in huge numbers to see him as he preached on the banks of the Jordan River. Then he baptized them saying, "I baptize you with water, but there is coming one who will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and with power." We know that he talked about the Messiah who would come after him, whose sandals he was not fit to tie. He spoke about being the forerunner of the Messiah, and this was what Isaiah prophesied.

What will this child turn out to be? They found out that this child turned out to be the forerunner of the Messiah. Everything that had been prophesied about him, the plan that had been scripted in heaven for him, found fulfillment in John's life till the very end when he was put to death in very unfortunate circumstances. But he lived his life in complete obedience to the will of God and the plan and purpose with which he had been birthed to an aged couple like Zechariah and Elizabeth, when they were well past the age of childbearing. But he fulfilled the promise of his birth.

What will this child turn out to be? I want us to turn that question around and ask ourselves that question. I'm sure that when we were born, our parents looked at us as they held us in their arms and wondered what our life would be like. What would be the things that got done and accomplished? What would we be like in terms of God's plans and purposes for our lives? Maybe, even you and I, as parents we have looked at our own children and thought: I wonder what will this child turn out to be? maybe it's possible that we've asked that question because of an extraordinary birth.

I know that both Sheila and I have looked at all our children, and strangely all of them had a complication at birth, and yet, were delivered safely. It was almost as if God held them and brought them out safely. We have often looked at each other and wondered and asked the question: God has saved this child. I wonder what He has in store for this one! I'm sure it's true for you, whether it's an extraordinary birth, or just a miraculous save that happened early on in childhood, or just something extraordinary or even ordinary that you found, but you just see the hand of God upon your child and you say, "I wonder what will this child turn out to be?"

As I pondered that question, I thought it's a good question for us to ask. Maybe our parents asked that question early on, but we can answer that question ourselves now as we look at our lives and ask ourselves the question: How have we turned out? Where do I stand in terms of God's plans and

purposes? Why am I here on earth? Maybe as we look at advent and the birth, maybe there's a new birth that might take place in us to realign us to God's purposes for our lives.

But I'm getting ahead of myself here. Let's back up a little and take that question seriously. Let's look at different areas that will help us to come to an informed opinion of how we have turned out, at least up till now. So what kind of questions can we ask, or what kind of boxes must we tick?

1. Have we realized our potential?

What potential do we have? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Let me throw out a few things.

- Maybe you have the potential to inspire people? You've seen that when you talk to somebody, you can help them go after their dreams or to come out of a dark place and once again, move on the path of life with zeal and enthusiasm and inspiration.
- Maybe you've seen that you're a good reconciler – that you can come in the middle where there's conflict, and you can help two warring parties come together and find common ground, and then be able to forget about or deal with their differences and move on.
- Maybe you found that you're a good encourager, that whenever you hear something, or you read something, you immediately send out a message of encouragement to somebody; and when they receive it, they always write back to you and say, "Thank you for that encouraging word because it lifted my spirit."
- Maybe you have the potential to see what's not yet visible – that you're able to look at a situation or a circumstance, or a person and see beyond their behavior and be able to see a wonderful person who has tremendous potential to be something that they are not playing out as. And you're able to chip away and bring out that person.
- Maybe you have the potential to shower compassion where it's needed – to be able to respond with empathy and speak words of comfort to people.

Have you and I realized our potential? When I say this, I mean that we need to look into our lives first to see these things, because if we don't see them, nothing can be done about them. So, have you taken the time to realize your potential?

2. Are you honing those skills/potential that you have?

If you're one who inspires, are you doing what you can to be better at inspiration? If you're one who encourages, are you doing what you can to be a better encourager or a person who is better at compassion or any of the other things that you have potential? Are you honing those skills?

You remember the story of the three servants that we looked at a couple of weeks back, when Jesus was talking about the kingdom of God; about the master who gave to his three servants certain amounts of money and he went off on a journey. The first two invested it, but the third kept it exactly as it was. The potential was there but he didn't do anything about it, and realized, to his detriment, that there were consequences for that.

Are we honing those skills and making sure that our potential is going out and doing what it was intended to do?

3. Are we fulfilling our reason for being here on earth?

What role does God want you to play? What specific purpose has He given to you that you need to operate in, whether it's in your office space or whether it's in your family; whether it's with friends, or the church, or the community that you live in, the society that you're a part of, or even this pandemic that we are part of. There's a reason why God thought it fit to place you and me here in the middle of a pandemic. God knew what He was doing. He could very easily have placed us before

or brought us in later. But He looked at us and said: These are the kinds of people I want in the midst of the pandemic.

So, we need to ask ourselves the question: Why has God placed me here? What is my reason for existing at this time? It's definitely not to hunker down and say: I'm going to wait till this passes. God wants us specifically to make an impact in every area of our lives, and in every situation and circumstance, however adverse and difficult they may be. He has a plan and purpose to use you and me even in this pandemic. Are we fulfilling our reason for being here on earth?

4. Are you listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit?

It is only if we do that, we will be able to know the things God has for us in terms of realizing our potential, in terms of understanding our reason for being here. Are we listening to Him? Are we guided by Him – which means are we allowing Him to steer our lives, to tell us what needs to be done and to help us get there. Are we being obedient to Him? Without that, we cannot in any way fulfill any of the things that we have been talking about.

5. Are you living a life that you can confidently give an account for?

I want to use 'confidently' very, very carefully because I don't want us to ever become complacent, thinking: I'm doing exactly what I need to do, and I'm fine. One day when I meet God.... No! When I say confidently – just to know that as much as I know, as much as I pray, as much as I listen to God, I'm doing the things. And with that confidence I can say: Lord, I am here and I will stand and give an account.

One day, we will be called on to give an account. And at that point, what will we say?

Romans 14:12-13 Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.

What will this child turn out to be?

As we stop here and think about all that we've heard, let us ask ourselves: How have I turned out? Where am I in this trajectory of life? If I were to stop here and ask myself "How do I stand?" will I find that I've not cared? "I'll just live my life the way I see it!" Or, as you look at your life, you realize that you know the things that you ought to be doing in fulfilling your potential, and your reason and everything else, but you baulked at it. You just stayed away and said, "No! those things are not what I'm comfortable with. Those things are not what I can do. I really don't want to do that." and you've just done your own thing.

Maybe you're unsure of what God wants you to do, or what is planned for you. It's because He does have a plan. And the idea is that we are able to match our lives with His plan for our life that was scripted in heaven before the foundations of the earth.

Look at some scriptures that talk about God knowing exactly what He wants from us.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Psalm 37:23

The steps of a man are established by the Lord and he delights in his way.

Proverbs 16:3-4

Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established. The Lord has made everything for its own purpose.

Psalm 139:16

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me when as yet there was none of them.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 1:5

I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.

God has a plan, beloved, for you and for me, and He has given us this lifetime that we have to accomplish it.

And to the question: What will this child turn out to be? The answer must be that this child will turn out to be a faithful one, who completely fulfills God's plans for his or her life. Maybe as we take stock today regarding this question, we need to make some choices, some re-aligning. Maybe we need to do a U-turn. Maybe we just need to say, "Lord, I'm confused. Will You help me? Will You bring clarity to my situation?" Or, "Lord, I've been disobedient, and I'm asking for forgiveness. I want to be obedient. Show me." Or maybe you're saying, "I've always felt I cannot. I don't have the resources."

Maybe God is saying: I don't care about all that. He asked Moses, "What do you have in your hand?" and what he had was a staff. And He was able to work with Moses. And He can do the same for you. So, let us consider this advent season, and consider the birth of Jesus that ensures that we will one day stand before God. How good it will be for us to stand before Him and hear Him say, "Well done! For the reason that I put you on this earth, you were able to fulfill." What a joyous moment that will be.

Shall we take a moment now and make sure that we can hear those words. I want to invite you to pray to God to help you to get on that wonderful trajectory of following His plan and His purpose for your life.

Let us pray. Father, Lord, saturate every home with Your Spirit in such ways that we will be forced to look into Your face and see Your plans for us, and know that You have the very best plans for us because You have our best interest at heart. You placed us here knowing that we can make a difference in this world, that You have endowed us with plans that are good. Lord, if we have not been fulfilling those plans for whatever reason, would You search our hearts? Would You come against whatever the enemy is holding against us, Lord? We give You permission Lord, to come in great power into our lives and throw out the evil one or his thoughts or the enticements that he has placed in our lives that have made us wander away. Through Your Spirit, turn us back to the place where we are once again focused on You, once again with our will securely in Yours, once again being able to say that we are fulfilling the reason why you entrusted us with this time, in this age and in this season. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.