

Feb 17th 2013 John the Baptist #2 "A Heart Filled With Praise" Luke 1:57-80

The humble house of the old priest Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth had become a busy but joyful place over the previous week, for the news of the birth to them of a son had exploded into that community like a sudden storm. Rumours had finally been proved true and the voice of the doubters had now been silenced for ever as the reality of Elizabeth becoming a brand new mum was obvious for all to see.

And they came to see in their droves. Some out of curiosity, but all to share in her joy. Luke tells us that:-

58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

But on this particular day—Indeed on this very special day for it was the day when the child would be named—the small house nestled there amongst the hill country of Judea was filled to capacity. For to it had come a group of friends, relatives, along with a physician and a priest, to perform the sacred rite of circumcision on the little 8 day old baby boy. After that the name would be declared.

So the covenantal act of circumcision is performed, with no doubt many tears shed by the baby and a few by his mother, but with loud acclaim from the men in the group, and then there followed the special prayer always prayed on such an occasion.

This time however, the ritual was a little different, because the man of the house was no longer the central figure. He is present, but it seems that he is on the periphery, for Zachariah is unable to speak. He hasn't for several months. He is there but not in charge. Isolated by his un-natural silence.

So they reach the point in the proceedings where the child received his name in a prayer of benediction. A prayer much like the one still in use in Jewish families today:-

"Our God, and the God of our fathers, raise up this child to his father and mother, and let his name be called in Israel Zacharias, the son of Zacharias. Let his father rejoice in the issue of his loins, and his mother in the fruit of her womb".

It was then that Elizabeth interjected—something no woman would normally think of doing. V66

60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

We can only imagine the consternation that would have followed. In the end they couldn't argue her out of her demand so they had to turn to the silent old man in the corner. ..v62

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

Isn't that so typical! Zachariah was dumb not deaf, but they made signs at him. And his response is to make signs back requesting a writing tablet upon which he wrote, "his name is John".

And immediately the scripture tells us that his vocal floodgates open. After 9 months of silence he begins to speak, praising God. I wish I had been there. Even if I had not been able to understand the language I would have sensed and felt the wonder and joy and praise that cascaded out of his heart in the form of his words that day. The last words that he had spoken had been words of doubt. The first words he now speaks are ones of glorious praise.

And we can understand his praise so well. For we all know, no doubt, those manifestations of God's power that really hit home to the heart. Wonderful answers to prayer, or signs of His presence and love that strike so deeply at our heart strings that we have burst into praise.

Just this week I decided on an impulse to catch up with Stewart Roberts in hospital, and as I walked down the corridor to his room I had no idea of the trauma that Stewart and Michelle were at that very moment experiencing. And when I walked into that room Stewart looked at me and said, "Did God send you?" For just prior to that moment in their struggling with their current issue they had said to each other, "we should contact Keith". And in I walked. And I felt overwhelmed by this sense of Almighty God. Of deep praise.

Yes we can understand Zechariah's praise. But what we mustn't miss is that Zechariah moved from small picture praise to big picture praise. His small picture praise was for what God had done in his own situation. The miracle

of birth. His spiritual healing through silence. That God had entrusted them with a child who would be a special prophet.

But then we turn to the song he proclaimed as the Spirit filled Him, and it's praise for the big picture of God redemption for His people. A picture that included Abraham and David and the prophets. A picture of the blessings that God was bringing upon His people because of the covenant He had made with them centuries before. Promises made then that God was now bringing to fruition. Look again at the first part of his song of praise.

***"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.***

And we too do well to praise God for the things He does for us, and in our lives, and in His church here at Craigie, but we also must praise God for all He is doing in the world right this minute. That today thousands throughout this world will become Christians as God completes His kingdom before His Son returns. That today His plans of Grace and Mercy are being fulfilled. and in so many places He is proving His might through signs and wonders. That today His resolve to bring about a new heavens and a new earth filled with His glory as the waters fill the seas, is very much on track.

So Zachariah praised God for the signs he could now see that God's great plan was being fulfilled. And then Zechariah praised God for what He would do through John. Through Zachariah's son.

***And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,***

***to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”***

Zechariah's praise becomes a prophecy of whom his son would become and of the One Whom he would precede, and his prophecy by the Spirit was based wholly on the only Bible Zechariah had....the Old Testament.

He had used his time of silence and seclusion well, to study the Old Testament Scriptures about the Messiah, and this song recorded in Luke for us, is the testimony of his belief.

And our belief in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will grow and develop, as did Zechariah's, according to the time we give to read, listen to, and study God's Word.

And this morning we praise God for that Belief that Zechariah proclaimed for we have seen and experienced the fruit of it.

That John the Baptist did become the Prophet of the Most High and did prepare the way of the Lord. That the Lord himself did become man and brought to this world the gift of forgiveness.

And that as Jesus He is indeed the rising sun, shining into our dark hearts of despair, and of shadow, and of death, with the transforming light of His presence. Guiding our feet away from destruction and hopelessness into the eternal path of peace.

This is the One we Believe in. This is the One we worship anew this morning with hearts full of praise. This is Jesus. Our Lord and our God.

