

**Other Miraculous Birth"**

There's a film showing in the cinemas at present called "Parental Guidance", which is a comic portrayal of the challenges associated with caring for three high maintenance grandchildren while the parents are away. The complicating factor is that the grandparents in question live a distance away and hardly ever see the family, and the only reason they have been entrusted with this responsibility is because the closer and more popular grandparents are unavailable. So when they arrive at their daughter's house one of the first things they notice is that there are lots of photos everywhere, and many of them are of the family with the grandfather and the grandmother, but it's not them. It's the popular grandparents. The ones who just about live at the house. The ones who get all the love and attention because they are always there. And as they search fruitlessly for a photo of them with the family, they turn to each other and say, "We are the other grandparents." The less important; the seldom called upon; the least thought about grandparents.

That's the meaning of my title this morning that relates to the birth of John the Baptist. His is the other miraculous birth that is completely overshadowed, and rightly so, by the birth of Jesus that we celebrated just over a month ago.

Of course I recognize that the birth of John is not even on the same page when it comes to comparing miracles, for Jesus is God born to a virgin and nothing can ever compare to that miracle except for our Lord's subsequent resurrection from the dead. But the majesty of one should not detract from the reality of the other, for John's birth was a miracle that is worthy of our reflection.

You see a miracle is an event that occurs which goes against the natural order of things, and it is obvious from what we read that such was very much the case as far as the conception of John was concerned. Luke 1:6-7 says of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John:-

***<sup>6</sup> Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. <sup>7</sup> But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.***

Immediately Luke, who was a Doctor remember, makes us of aware of not just one but two natural rules that would not allow Elizabeth to bear a child. She was barren and had been for sometime, which meant that she had never been able to bear children. And also both she and her husband were now way past the age when child bearing, even for those who were not barren, was even slightly possible. These guys were just too old to be parents.

Consequently I believe that we are justified in asking the question, " why did God make it so difficult for the fore runner of the Messiah to be born"? Surely there were healthy

young or middle age couples around who were righteous and praying for a child. People who could give this special baby love and discipline and security for many years. Why choose a couple who had learnt how to live without children, and were well towards the later years of their lives, even before the baby was born?

The initial answer to that is **that** his birth, childhood, and subsequent development would be a testimony to the power of Almighty God. John was to be God's special instrument. He would become the voice crying in the wilderness that Isaiah had prophesied would come many centuries beforehand. And for his entry into this world God needed to use two people whose utter powerlessness and physical inadequacy would allow Him to use them as part of His miracle.

You could say of Zechariah and Elizabeth that they were unsuitable enough for God to be able to use them.

And you know, there have been many times in my ministry when I have felt unsuitable for the task God has given me. Times when I have sat with fellow ministers and marveled at the things they were doing and planning for God. Impressed by their obvious expertise, and wondering what I was doing in their company. And other occasions too, when I have felt so overwhelmed by the situation that I find myself in, that I've asked God again and again, why me? And His response has constantly been, because you are weak enough for me to use. Unsuitable enough for my power to be manifested through you.

Have you ever felt like that?

Paul explained why this is in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

***27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.***

SO GOD USED THEM TO SHOW FORTH HIS POWER

Another answer to our question is that using Zachariah and Elizabeth was always part of God's almighty plan. He had planned the birth of John the Baptist right down to its fine details, when He had set in His mind the Salvation of mankind through His very own sacrifice.

It would be ridiculous for us to think that God, some 18 months before the baby Jesus was born, suddenly started looking around for two people who could be the parents of John the Baptist, saw Zechariah and Elizabeth, thought to Himself, 'Well they will do, I must send Gabriel along to give them the news'.

Of course He didn't. He knew from the beginning that He would use them in His plan, and He knew why and He knew how. We can look back on the story today and we can

begin to see some of the reasons why God obviously used them. That Zechariah was a priest came into it, and that he was being a priest in the Temple when the angel spoke to him about the baby was full of significance. And of course Elizabeth being a relative of Mary was a vital component, and there are many other details that made this couple perfect for God's purposes that we can see in hindsight.

But the major and most wonderful truth is that God had factored this old couple into His plans, because that is how God works. And He still works that way today. When God lays a task upon your heart by His Spirit, or sends someone along to call you to be available for Him in some area small or great, it is because He has factored you into His plans. You may feel completely unsuitable, and in human eyes you could be right, but God has factored you into His plans. You may simply feel that you don't want to do it, or that you won't be available to do it, or have the necessary resources for it, but God has factored you into His plans. You may argue with God, and challenge His choice of you as Zechariah did, but never forget that if the call comes from God then that means that in His wisdom and Grace, He has factored you into His plans. How astonishing is that!

#### SO GOD USED THEM BECAUSE THEY WERE PART OF HIS PLAN

Then the final answer to the question of why God used these two old people to be the parents of John the Baptist is because Such Was His Preference. There are things in life that we go through which are not God's preference for us. Things we suffer through the attacks of the evil one or the behaviour of others against us. Stuff that happens due to the fact that we live in a fallen world.

Yet in regard to our ministry and service for Christ and where He calls us to be in terms of worship—in terms of fellowship—and in terms of so many of the varied experiences of life that we go through. We are there because of God's Preference. He could have chosen anyone, but He chose us. That was His preference.

When the Angel announced to Zechariah that his wife would have this son who would do such great things for Israel, all Zechariah could think about at first was the impossibility of it all. He asked for a sign because in his heart he was thinking that it couldn't happen because they were too old, and even if it did happen how could they be expected to cope at their age with a baby. It would turn their lives upside down. Zachariah wanted God to look for someone else.

God's response was pretty strong: 1:19-20

***19 The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."***

I tend to feel that it wasn't just a case of Zechariah not believing, but of Zechariah not wanting to believe because it all seemed to difficult for him to contemplate. Yet God's

preference was to do it His way using Zechariah and Elizabeth, and that wasn't about to change. And even Zechariah's enforced silence and time of inactivity allowed God to prepare his heart through the scriptures, for the task that lay ahead.

This experience of Zechariah reminds me of times when as a kid I was instructed to do something that I didn't want to do, and I would turn to my mum and say, why can't so and so do it. And the response was always, Because I want you to do it.

That's what happens here. It also happened to Moses at the burning bush. To Jeremiah when God called him to be a prophet. To Peter when Jesus said to him after His resurrection, Feed my sheep. You will do it because I want you to do it

God's preference for us may not always be what we want, but because it is God's preference for us, we can be sure that God will always bless us through it, despite sometimes the pain and inconvenience we may suffer along the way.

And of course in Jesus we find the greatest example of accepting God's preference for Him when He said at Gethsemene, not just once but three times, "yet not my will but yours be done".

#### SO GOD USED THEM BECAUSE SUCH WAS HIS PREFERENCE

Over the next couple of weeks we will be thinking a lot about John the Baptist. The son that this old couple eventually bore. And as we do let us always remember that behind John we see two elderly people that were obedient despite the upheaval to their lives.

And that in them we see testimony to God's Power, Plan, and Preference for all His children, that still undergirds His desire to use every single one of us in some way, for His Glory and for His Kingdom.