

Forerunner Has Arrived

Nine months have elapsed. The memories about the encounter with Gabriel were probably relived in Zacharias' dreams night after night and in his conversations with Elizabeth. God had answered their prayers in a way that would dramatically change their lives. They could only imagine the future. They had nine months to prepare for the arrival of the forerunner of the Messiah. He was going to come in the power and spirit of Elijah. They had no idea what to expect from him, nor did they know what that really meant. They had been preparing for this child for nine months. There were no sonograms in those ancient days, yet they knew the child would be a boy. Just imagine how the women in the neighborhood and at the synagogue must have reacted when they heard the child would be a boy! Zach and Liz were preparing boy clothes for their little guy. Mom and dad were both of priestly descent, and they must have thought about the fact that John the Baptist would be a priest, prophet, and the forerunner of the Messiah. They must have searched the scriptures for clues again and again. Zach believed God now. The doubts were gone and now they were simply waiting.

ON HIS WAY. When we come to Luke 1:57, the wait is finally over; and Elizabeth gives birth.

Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her. (NASB) Luke 1:57

This was not a normal birth. Not only was the child to be unusual, but the birth should not have occurred from a human viewpoint. That is the way God operates. The couple believed that God could do the impossible. Then good old Zach had a momentary problem of doubt that caused life to be complicated. But God did not cancel their prayer request. He did not cancel His plans. The child was not born to some other "more deserving parents." God disciplined Zach, and then proceeded with His blessing. Sometimes we get strange ideas about God and think that He gives gifts only when we are good, or perhaps just to the pastor. If that were true, then Zach and Liz should not have had the child. No! God gives us gifts because He loves us. Sometimes He waits for us to ask (James. 4:2). On some occasions He might not grant our request if we like our sin

and are unrepentant. But most of the time God gives gifts because He loves us.

What a blessing John was to his parents. The neighbors and the family knew he was unusual. It was obvious that God had intervened and performed a miracle for Zach and Liz. This senior woman should not have been able to give birth, but she did. It was clear that God had a purpose for this child as He does with everyone of us!

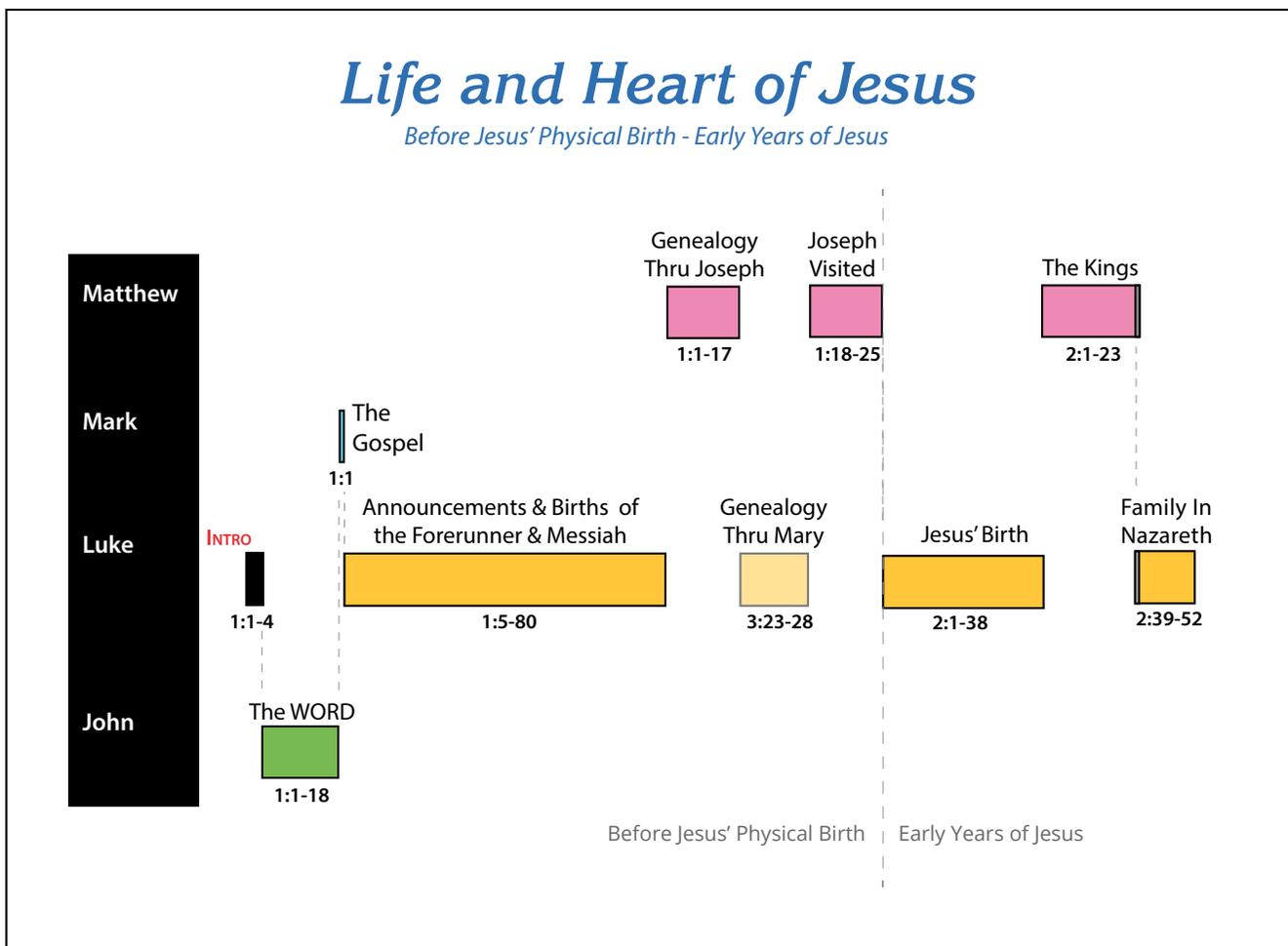
HIS NAME. When the newborn child was eight days old, his parents had him circumcised according to the Mosaic Law (Lev. 12:1-2).

And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John." And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name." (NASB) Luke 1:59-61

Apparently, it was the Jewish custom to name the child at the time he was circumcised (Luke 2:21). So a group of friends and maybe relatives had gathered for "The Circumcision Party" of Liz's baby. Just imagine a circumci-

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sion party! So they are all gathered together and someone probably said, “Call him Zach” and then others agreed. The Greek word implies that Liz responded with a very strong “No!” She wanted him to be called John and then confusion followed. It is obvious by their response that not only was this unexpected, but it had never been done before. No one had ever been named John in their family before. Liz was probably feeling some stress about now when someone had the bright idea of appealing to her husband Zach.

And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished. (NASB) Luke 1:62 -63

So they started making signs at Zach. The Greek word translated as “signs” actually means “to nod, to wave, to make signs.” Just imagine a group of people eagerly trying to communicate by waving their hands and arms. It would

have been fun to see.

Now why were they making signs to Zach? Had Zach heard the discussion? If he had heard the discussion, he could have easily helped by pointing to Liz and indicating that she gave the right answer; but he did not do that. Why all the signs? The answer is found in Luke 1:22 where we were told that Zacharias was “mute.” The Greek word for mute - one who cannot speak - is KOPHOS. This word also occurs in Luke 7:22 where it is used of a deaf man. That is, KOPHOS can refer to a man who cannot speak and cannot hear. This means that Zach could not hear and could not speak. So he asks for a writing tablet. Aristotle and the papyri reveal that the ancients used writing tablets that were wood covered with wax. The writer used a stylus to print a message. Once finished writing, the wax would be smoothed out to be ready to write on again. So Zach told them that the baby’s name would be John, and they were astonished. They were astonished because Zach had not

heard Liz's answer. When asked about the baby's name, he gave them the same answer. Now that would be surprising! They were very surprised.

ANOTHER MIRACLE. Immediately, Zach was able to speak and hear, and their guests saw another miracle of God. The one who could not hear or speak was now able to share what God had done in his life.

And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God. Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him. (NASB) Luke 1:64-66

The news spread like wild fire through the Jewish community. Have you ever noticed that good news rarely spreads faster than bad news? Bad news, especially gossip, flows fast and furious. Gossip is a cancer among Christians. What a sad commentary on our churches when it is present. If only our lips were as slow to spread bad news as some Christians are when it comes to telling others about Jesus Christ! But with Zach and Liz the news was good, and it spread all over that the hand of the Lord was on their child.

ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY - THE RESCUE. Sometime after the baby was named, Zach was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave a prophecy concerning their son - concerning the forerunner of the Messiah. This must have been emotional.

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant — as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old — salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, and FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US . . . (NASB) Luke 1:67-71

The Greek word he used for "visited" in verse 68 implies that the Lord God had not just visited them; He visited with the goal of helping them. He came to save them from

their enemies. The Greek word for save or salvation literally means "saving, preservation, deliverance, restore to safety, and made safe." Most Christians think of "salvation" as implying forgiveness from sin, but it can also simply refer to being rescued from something or someone. In Zacharias' prophecy "salvation" refers to being rescued from their enemies - from people and nations who hate them. This was a fulfillment of prophecies made by the prophets of old.

We will see later that the Jews rejected Jesus. They rejected their king. The sign nailed to the wooden cross on which He died read, "King of the Jews" (John 19:21), but the Jewish leaders rejected Him. They did not want Him to be their king. What a mistake! Jesus knew this would happen, and so He had previously predicted that the city of Jerusalem - the nation of Israel - would be destroyed.

When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ". . . For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." (NASB) Luke 19:41-44

The expression "horn of salvation" in verse 69 implies that God had intended to do a great rescue (1 Sam. 2:10; 2 Sam. 23:3). That rescue was delayed to a distant future after they rejected Jesus Christ. That future rescue has not occurred yet. We are still waiting for it to occur.

Jesus came to show mercy, grace, compassion, and to fulfill His promise to the prophets and to Abraham. Jesus had a mission in life. He had a purpose for coming to this planet.

To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. (NASB) Luke 1:72-75

Thousands of years earlier Abraham, the great patriarch to the Jews, knew that Jesus was to come and why He was to

come. It is wonderful, although not surprising, that Zacharias includes Abraham in his prophecy because the Jews traced their lineage back to him through his son Isaac. The Arabs trace their lineage back to Abraham through Ishmael, Abraham's other son. The promise that God made to Abraham was a significant one because it was about Jesus,

Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD . . . I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (NASB) Genesis 22:15-18

Abraham was significant to Zacharias and Elizabeth because he was their historical father. Abraham and Sarah had been buried in the Cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23; 50:13). The cave was located in Hebron, where we believe that Zach and Liz lived. It would have been a place that Jews would visit. The cave would have been a constant reminder of this dearly beloved man. So it is not surprising that Abraham's name occurred in Zacharias' prophecy. He was loved by the Jewish people. They clung to the promise that God made to him, and Abraham was an example of one who submitted to God's will. He was the friend of God.

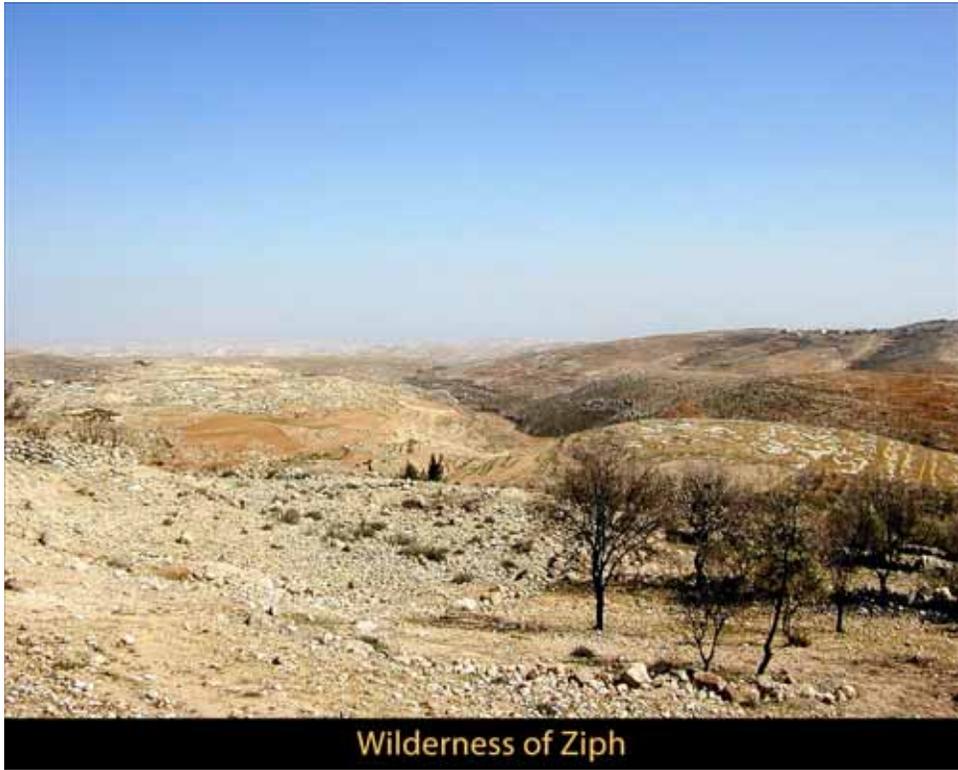
ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY - THE MESSIAH. Zacharias' prophecy now shifts to John's purpose in life, his mission, his reason for existence, why he was here.



Cave of Machpelah - Hebron

The Holy Spirit tells us in Gal. 3:16 that "seed" refers to Jesus. God had called Abraham and given him a mission in life. Abraham had a purpose in life just as Zach and Liz and their baby John had a purpose. The prophets of old had a purpose in life. Everyone of us has a purpose for existing, but some of us miss it and life is not what it should be. What is your purpose in life? Why are you here? What has God called you to do?

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (NASB) Luke 1:76-79



Wilderness of Ziph



Waterhole In the Judean Wilderness

John was to be a prophet of God. He was not going to be just any prophet. He was the prophet who would be preparing the way of the Lord. He was the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1. What a great calling in life - to present God to the world!

As a young man I remember asking God, "Why am I here?" I was struggling and realized that God wanted me to teach His Word and be a spiritual shepherd. Then I was surprised later in life to discover that I was asking the same question once again. I have gone through three periods in my life time wondering what God wanted to accomplish in my life. I wonder if John did? John's mission in life was to introduce the Messiah - He who would forgive our sins. The Greek word for "forgive" has the idea of "to leave, to depart, to send away, and to dismiss." That is what happens when God forgives your sins. Your sins are sent away. They are not remembered again. They are gone.

This Messiah - Jesus Christ - whom John was to introduce to the world is poetically called the Sunrise. He was to give and did give light to a dark world. The world has always been in the dark. This is obvious when it calls sin good and holiness evil. That is what we see today in our world. Abortion is called good when God calls it murder. Homosexuality is considered an alternative lifestyle, but God calls it sin. Divorce and immorality are okay but not according to God. Modern society says the worship of God should occur in private and considers it evil if it occurs in public. Our world is in darkness and is headed for trouble. John's mission in

life was to present the world with the Sunrise which would shine light in the darkness. What a calling in life! What a great reason for existing! Why are you here?

CONCLUSION. John came into the world for a reason. He must have known early in his childhood why he was here on this planet. He grew into a young boy, then a young man, and eventually an adult, knowing that God had a purpose for him.

[And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel. \(NASB\) Luke 1:80](#)

We are told that he lived in the desert or wilderness. This was his place of education and preparation. We do not know exactly where in the wilderness he lived, but it was barren. He had time for reflection and communication with God. Then one day he was ready. John the Baptist appeared and called people to repent. The Messiah was near.

What is your purpose in life? Do you know why you are here? It does not matter how old or how young you are. God's purpose for your life can change over the course of time. I would encourage you to seek Him. He has called you to serve Him and not yourself. That could mean a new direction in your life. We are not here for ourselves, but for Him. What does He want you to do? The first step to discovery is simple - it starts with surrender to Him and a prayer, "Lord please show me your purpose for my life."