

Meet the Greatest Man Who Ever Lived—Besides Jesus

Now Elizabeth's time had come to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and cousins heard how the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they were calling him Zechariah, after the name of his father. But his mother answered, "Not so! He shall be called John." They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." They made signs to his father, asking what he would have him called. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he spoke and praised God. Fear came on all who lived around them. And all these facts were talked about throughout all the hill country of Judea. All those who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will he be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be 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 of long ago, 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 out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives. 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, whereby the sunrise from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he remained in the wilderness until the day of his appearance to Israel. (Luke 1:57-80)

At the age of 26 my wife and I welcomed our first child into the world. I can still remember how excited and overwhelmed I felt awaiting her arrival.

Would we have a boy or a girl? Would she be healthy? Would mom be okay through the delivery? I cannot express in words what it felt like to hold our child, but every parent knows what I'm talking about.

Have you ever waited expectantly for the birth of a child you loved and could not wait to meet? That is the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

This barren and broken elderly couple had been waiting for decades to be graced with the gift of a baby. Additionally, the world had been awaiting the arrival of their son for hundreds of years since the prophets promised his coming.

Now, John's birth has finally arrived, and we get to share in Zechariah and Elizabeth's joy as they celebrate the birth of their son. Everyone was clamoring to name the child; it's amazing how some things never change. All of the relatives pressured the couple to stick with tradition and name the boy Zechariah, after his father.

Elizabeth tried to explain that the angel Gabriel had already instructed them to name the child John. The people looked to Zechariah for confirmation, but he was still unable to speak, ever since his initial unbelief that he would ever be a

father. He can still communicate, however, so Zechariah takes up a pen and paper and writes, "His name is John."

"And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed," Luke tells us, "and he spoke, blessing God" (Luke 1:64). The first words out of Zechariah's mouth in nine long months are words of prophetic praise to the Lord.

All of this provoked wonder in the people of this quiet little town. The Bible tells us that they thought, "What then will this child be?" (Luke 1:66) We learn from Gabriel, Zechariah's prophesy, and Jesus' word later on that, other than Jesus, this child John will be no less than the greatest man who ever lived.

When you think of godly parents, who comes to mind that you know? How can you encourage them today? {eoa}

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