



June 24, 2018 Luke 1:57-66, 80 & Is. 49: 1-6

Birth of John the Baptist

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Stone, Naomi. [The Sacred Invitation](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Prophecy](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

[The Naming of John the Baptist](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

God is once again active in the lives of the people with the birth of this son to aged parents. We find the relatives and neighbors hovering around and actively involved in the situation. Elizabeth, totally aware of God's involvement in this 'miraculous' birth, takes the initiative and gives the baby his name – "Yahweh is gracious".

As you reflect on this passage, try to imagine yourself in this situation. Try to enter into the thoughts and feelings of: Zechariah, Elizabeth, relatives, neighbors and those at the synagogues who had to be puzzled at all that happened. What insights were given to you?

Luke 1:57-66, 80

57 When it was time for **Elizabeth** to have her baby, she gave **birth to a son**. 58 Her **neighbors** and **relatives** heard that the Lord had shown her **great mercy**, and they shared her **joy**. 59 On the **eighth day** they came to **circumcise** the child, and they were going to **name him** after his father **Zechariah**, 60 but his **mother spoke up** and said, "No! He is to be called **John**." 61 They said to her, "There is no one among your **relatives** who has that name." 62 Then they made **signs to his father**, to find out what he would like to **name the child**. 63 He asked for a **writing tablet**, and to everyone's **astonishment** he **wrote**, "His name is **John**." 64 Immediately his **mouth was opened** and his **tongue was loosed**, and he began to **speak, praising God**. 65 The **neighbors** were all **filled with awe**, and **throughout the hill country** of Judea people were **talking** about all these things. 66 **Everyone** who heard this **wondered** about it, asking, "**What then is this child going to be?**" For the **Lord's hand was with him**.

80 And the **child grew and became strong in spirit**; and he lived in the **desert** until he appeared publicly to Israel.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: John's name means "Yahweh is gracious". Do you know what your [name means](#)?

PRAYER: Lord God, creator of all there is, was and ever will be, I am awed at the faith of the people who chose to do your will down through the ages. At John's birth people asked: "What then is this child going to be?" Now it is my turn to ponder what you are calling me into as I wake each day. Help me to discover what your love is inviting me into, and help me also with the strength to follow as they did. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth means "El is fullness". She and her husband were both descendants of Aaron and therefore members of priestly families. She like others before her was to bear a son who would be significant in the salvation history of the people of Israel. *How does knowing the meaning of her name help you to understand what Luke is saying in this text?*

BIRTH TO A SON: We find echoes of other births of sons, Isaac, Samson, and Samuel to parents too old to normally give birth. *What expectations are evoked as the people remember this earlier miraculous births?*

GREAT MERCY / JOY: Mercy is the unmerited gift of a loving God, which evokes joy in those who receive it. *Have you ever experienced unmerited mercy? Did it leave you with great joy? If so, how can this memory help you better understand this text?*

NEIGHBORS / RELATIVES: Everyone is included in this latest revelation of God's mercy. *What does knowing that all these people were involved add to your understanding of this event?*

EIGHTH DAY / CIRCUMCISE: Under the Jewish dispensation, church and state were identical. No one could be a member of the one without also being a member of the other. Circumcision was a sign and seal of membership in both. Every circumcised person

bore thereby evidence that he was one of the chosen people, a member of the church of God as it then existed, and consequently also a member of the Jewish commonwealth. (Info about the eighth day below)

What are the ways that a person achieves inclusion in the faith community and society today?

NAME HIM / NAME THE CHILD: Naming the child was usually the province of the father and most often was a name from his family history.

Does the fact that this family traces its history by way of the priestly clan make this unusual choice even more significant? How would having the mother name the child, challenge people's expectations?



ZECHARIAH: Zechariah means Yahweh has remembered. Zechariah was one of 24 priestly divisions that served at the Jerusalem temple. Each division served a 1-week rotation every 6 months. There were thousands of priests involved, so it was a rare privilege for him to be chosen by lot to burn the twice-daily incense offering in the sanctuary.

Does the synchronicity of these events give extra meaning to what happens? If so, how?

MOTHER SPOKE / WROTE / SPEAK / TALKING: Luke's gospel gives women their voices and we find early on a break with "tradition" when Elizabeth speaks.

What do you think the people would make of this unusual behavior of Elizabeth?

JOHN: The name John means, "Yahweh is gracious. John will live into the meaning of his name.

What is the meaning of your name? How might knowing the meaning help to direct your path?

SIGNS TO HIS FATHER: WRITING TABLET: Luke inserts a reversal of roles. Zechariah the father asks how he is to know this, and Mary, the mother of Jesus ask how can this be?

How do you react when your life includes something that causes you to step out of your role? Could this example suggest that this might be an opportunity given you by God for something special?

ASTONISHMENT / MOUTH WAS OPENED / TONGUE WAS LOOSED / WONDERED / FILLED WITH AWE: God continues to leave people with mouths agape with surprise, as God

continues to reveal that something new is coming to be.

When was the last time you were surprised? Did your wondering cause you to respond with awe?

PRAISING GOD: Once again God provides, and the people recognize the source of the gift with praise.

Does your faith life help you to see the unexpected blessings as a cause to praise God?

THROUGH THE HILL COUNTRY: EVERYONE: The news spreads far and wide very quickly.

When was the last time you couldn't wait to 'spread some good news'? How did you do it?

WHAT THEN IS THIS CHILD GOING TO BE: LORD'S HAND WAS WITH HIM: Every time God surprises the people, they see it as a sign that their salvation comes from and through God's mercy.

How can this study on this text help you to do the same?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 1:59 // Gen. 17:10; Lev. 12:3; Lk. 1: 63 // Lk. 1:13; Lk. 1:64 // Lk. 1:20;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 49:1-6; [Ps 139:1b-3, 13-14ab, 14c-15](#); Acts 13:22-26; Lk. 1: 57-66, 80;

Revised Common Lectionary: I Sam. 1a, 4-11, 19-23, [Ps. 9:9-20](#), 2 Cor. 6: 1-13, Lk. 4: 35-41

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Within each tradition, unsettling but needed voices are arising—prophetic voices, we might call them, voices of change, hope, imagination, and new beginnings. They say there's an alternative to static or rigid religion on the one hand and religion-free secularism on the other. They claim that the Spirit is calling us, not to dig in our heels, but rather to pack up our tents and get moving again. Prophets, by their very nature, cannot be at the center of any social structure. Rather, they are "on the edge of the inside." They cannot be fully insiders, but they cannot throw rocks from outside either. They must be educated inside the system, knowing and living the rules, before they can critique what is non-essential or not so important. Jesus did this masterfully (see Matthew 5:17-48). This is what Martin Luther King, Jr. taught the United States, what Gandhi taught British-occupied India, and what Nelson Mandela taught South Africa. Only with great respect for and understanding of the rules can a prophet know how to properly break those very same rules—for the sake of a greater purpose and value. A prophet critiques a system by quoting its own documents, constitutions, heroes, and Scriptures against its present practice. This is their secret: systems are best unlocked from inside. A prophet is one who

shall drink no wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the [Holy Ghost](#), even from his mother's womb. And he shall [convert](#) many of the [children of Israel](#) to the [Lord their God](#). And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of [Elias](#); that he may turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the incredulous to the wisdom of the just, to prepare unto the Lord a [perfect people](#)" (1:8-17). As Zachary was slow in [believing](#) this startling prediction, the [angel](#), making himself known to him, announced that, in punishment of his incredulity, he should be stricken with dumbness until the promise was fulfilled. "And it came to pass, after the days of his office were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days, Elizabeth his wife conceived, and hid herself five months" (1:23-24).

His name is John: When time had in earth's process made a breach / and life from life was fresh and timely torn, / a new and timeless wonderment is born, / voiceless to tell in time prophetic speech. / Old flesh responds with joy embracing each / new sound, rejoicing as a bright celestial morn / enjoys dispersing night, discarding worn / and joyless garb of hopelessness to reach / and unexpected state of fair delight, / delighting all and causing them to press / old customs forward yet nevertheless / willing to yield if silence would but write. / Silent the lips but silent not the pen - / a written name – and speech returns again.

Terrance Y. Mullins Christian Century. December 6, 2000 Page 1274.

[The Quran](#) mentions John the Baptist many times.

"Zechariah, We bring you the good news of the birth of a son whose name shall be John, one whose namesake We never created before.' He said: 'My Lord! How can I have a boy when my wife is barren and I have reached an extremely old age?' He answered: 'So shall it be.' Your Lord says: 'It is easy for Me', and then added: 'For beyond doubt, I created you earlier when you were nothing' (Quran 19:7-9).

"Zechariah exclaimed: 'My Lord! How shall I have a son when old age has overtaken me and my wife is barren?' He said: 'Thus shall it be; Allah does what He wills'"(Quran 3:40).

"And We bestowed favor upon Zechariah, when he cried to his Lord: 'Lord! Leave me not solitary [without any issue]. You are the best Inheritor.' So We accepted his prayer and bestowed upon him John, and We made his wife fit (to bear a child). Verily they hastened in doing good works and called upon Us with longing and fear, and humbled themselves to Us" (Quran 21:89-90).

The birth of John the Baptist is mentioned in a sermon of St. Augustine (Sermo 293, 1-3; PL 38, 1327-1328)

[John](#), it seems, has been inserted as a kind of boundary between the two Testaments, the Old and the New. That he is somehow or other a boundary is something that the Lord himself indicates when he says, The Law and the prophets were until John. So he represents the old and heralds the new. Because he represents the old, he is born of an elderly couple; because he represents the new, he is revealed as a prophet in his mother's womb. You will remember that, before he was born, at Mary's arrival he leapt in his mother's womb. Already he had been marked out there, designated before he was born; it was already shown whose forerunner he would be, even before he saw him. These are divine matters, and exceed the measure of human frailty. Finally, he is born, he receives a name, and his father's tongue is loosed. Zachary is struck dumb and loses his voice, until John, the Lord's forerunner, is born and releases his voice for him.

Scripture scholars suggest that the way to discover the true prophet, the ones who really are intended by God to be the conscience of the people as a Scripture scholar said it, the way to discover that is by making sure that you ask, "Does this person preaching take us back to the beginnings of our faith?" Authentic prophets are always concerned that we remember why our faith came into being in the first place. Bp. Gumbleton

Lk. 1.57–66: John's birth and naming. 59: Circumcise, the sign of the covenant (Heb "brit") between God and Israel, in accord with Gen 17.11–12; 21.4; Lev 12.3; see also Lk 2.21; m. Shabb. 18.3. Zechariah after his father (see Tob 1.1; Josephus, J.W. 5.13.2; Ant. 14.1.3), a tradition maintained in Sephardic (Mediterranean) but not Ashkenazic (Eastern European) Jewish culture; in the latter, children are named after deceased relatives. Naming sons at circumcision is not attested in Jewish sources until the post-Talmudic period (eighth century). Earlier Jewish texts attest naming after grandfathers, but not after fathers (unless the father is deceased). 60: John, see 1.13n. 66: Hand of the Lord, Ex 9.3; 16.3; Josh 4.24; 22.31; Isa 41.20; 66.14; and elsewhere, often in contexts of judgment. 80: Grew and became strong, compare 2.52. Wilderness, see 3.4; site of Israel's encounter with God at Sinai; here, by the Jordan River; see also Judg 13.25. 2. Pgs. 100-101. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

So [prophetic vocation](#) is first to help the faith community to embrace a loss that it does not want to admit and then, secondly, to proclaim to the people a hope that they cannot dare to imagine. Fr. Bryan Massingale

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

White, William R. [Stories For the Journey](#). Minneapolis, MN. Augsburg Pub. House. 1988. A SPECIAL STORYTELLER: Page 32.

Grana, Janice, Ed. [Images](#). Winona, MN. St. Mary's College Press. 1976. TOO EARLY: Page 84. IN TUNE: Page 109.