



Luke 1:57-80
 Living as Followers of Jesus
 “The Man Can Talk!”

Rev. Brian North
 December 22nd, 2024
 4th Sunday in Advent

Pray. We started this series back on the first of December when we looked at the story of Zechariah and how the angel Gabriel announced to him that he and his wife Elizabeth would conceive and give birth to a baby boy, and that they are to name him John. Zechariah had his doubts about this plan because he and his wife are “well along in years” and the penalty he paid for this doubt is that he is made mute until the baby is born. Since that Sunday as we continued in the rest of Luke 1, we haven’t heard anything from Zechariah, but also not really even about him. But today that changes as the narrative shifts back to the birth of John.

And with his birth, we see a great question that we all wonder about a child when they’re born and about ourselves as we grow and mature: **“Who is this child going to be?” “Who am I going to be?”** We ask young kids: What do you want to be when you grow up? JD, our first grader, loves to tell people he wants to be a police officer. He’s had a police officer costume for about a year that has influenced that, and recently for his birthday my parents got him a remote-control car that’s a Lamborghini police car. Now he really wants to be a police officer so he can drive one of those for real. I keep telling JD: I think what you actually mean is you want to be an Italian police officer.

But this question gets down to a deeper level than our career. Who *are* you? What will you be known for? How will you impact others? What will your legacy be? What will be your convictions and values? These questions start getting asked the moment we’re born. Not by us asking them ourselves, but by others asking them about us. And then as we grow, we start to ask them of ourselves as well. I would also suggest to you that the answer to these questions begins to get formed in us when we’re born, as well. We see all of this in today’s passage, specifically about John, but it sheds light on our own lives as well. So, let’s read Luke 1:57-80, taking it in two sections today. We’ll start with the first 10 verses (**1:57-66 here**), and then read the rest just a bit later.

So, as Gabriel announced to Zechariah, the boy is to be named John. The relatives and friends, when they heard that from Elizabeth, couldn't comprehend the choice of name. No family history with that name. So, Zechariah steps up and writes down what his name is going to be: John. He is obedient to what God asked him to do. And immediately his season of being mute is ended, he can talk all that he wants to, and so Elizabeth bursts into tears. Ok...that's not there, and I doubt it was true. I'm sure she was happy. Zechariah definitely is, and he begins to praise God. The first thing he does is praise God! Whether you've been facing a hardship for 9 months or you're celebrating a joyful occasion, or you've got both of those situations at the same time, you can always praise God. Psalm 34:1 puts it well: **"I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips"** (Psalm 34:1). Zechariah shows us that here.

And then Luke tells us in verse 66 that people started asking this question, "What kind of child will this be?" In other words, "What is John going to be?" It might be easy to presume that they're asking this because Zechariah's season of being mute ends with the announcement of John's name, but the fact is, we ask questions like this whenever a child is born. And we continue to ask these questions. I still wonder what I'm going to be when I grow up. But especially at a birth, it's a very natural thing to ask or wonder and think about. And a lot more questions than what I said earlier might go through our heads in a moment like this: What will this baby's personality be like? Will this baby be an athlete? A musician? A scholar? Will he or she own their business? Work in the trades? Be a Pastor? Teacher? Get married? Have kids? Live to 100? And then some critical ones: Husky, Cougar, or something else? Skier or snowboarder? So many questions...so many possibilities.

And we see here that: **Although the pregnancy was unexpected, it was not unwelcome.** Elizabeth and Zechariah had desire to be parents. And so, the pregnancy, and then his birth, is welcomed with joy and thanksgiving. Bruce Larson, the former head pastor of University Presbyterian Church (passed away in 2008) writes of visiting two different couples who were expecting a baby. One said, "Oh! Isn't this awful, pregnant again!" The second couple said, "We can't believe our good fortune." Even while a baby is in the womb,

the person they're going to become is being shaped, and of course that continues on throughout life. But, "Who you are going to be" is getting shaped right from the start.

In our family we have intentionally sought to shape our kids right from the start. We've let them know that in our family you have to love Jesus, ski, and root for the Huskies. We have shaped those values in our kids from the get-go. What I *should* have said was "love Jesus, ski, and attend the UW" because so far I'm 0 for 3 on where my kids have gone to college...but they do still root for the Huskies, so I guess mission accomplished. And of course they ski, and most importantly: they are disciples of Jesus.

What we see in the text, and from what we know about John's life that's recorded a bit later, is that **Zechariah and Elizabeth shape John to be a godly man who paved the way for Jesus**. They certainly had no idea what that would mean for John, or what God was going to do through Jesus...but they shaped him right from the start to follow God's calling and prepare the way for Jesus. We'll come back to that later. Let's read the rest of the passage – **verses 67-80**.

So Zechariah, much like Mary in last Sunday's passage, then has some words of praise of what God is doing and is going to do, and John's role in it all. Again, like last week's passage is often called "Mary's song" this is often called, "Zechariah's song", though again there's a pretty good chance he didn't actually sing this, but you never know. But it does have a poetic feel to it, which is why it's often called a song. Anyway: **The first part, verses 67-74, is all about God's covenant and activity in the world**. It's what God is doing. He's the one who's coming to redeem his people; he's the one who promised to do this through the lineage of David; he's the one who through his prophets has said he would save his people from those who stand against them and even hate them; he's the one who will act merciful and remember his holy covenant.

One thing he says in particular, that might be a little foreign to us, is that he has "raised up a horn of salvation" (Luke 1:69). The horn, or antlers in some instances, is the point of strength of an animal, for those that have

horns. It's the focus of power for a bull, a moose, a buck, a rhinoceros and more. And this prophetic word is about Jesus. He's the one in whom God's power is going to be focused, to bring this salvation. The covenant with Abraham referenced in verses 72 and 73, is spoken to Abraham a couple different times. We find it in Genesis 12 and a little fuller version in Genesis 22. In essence God's covenant says that God's chosen people are going to come through Abraham, and they are chosen to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. So, they're chosen for a purpose, to be a blessing, and point people to the God of the universe.

The second half of what he says is directed to his son, John: that he will be a prophet of the most High; he will prepare the way of the Lord. And then Zechariah says he will give them knowledge of salvation. We come back to that theme. Before, it was about deliverance from enemies – political enemies, at the national level are certainly what is meant. But here, salvation is defined differently, and this is the salvation that John would teach of and prepare the way for Jesus. **This salvation that John prepares people for, and Jesus offers, has to do with the forgiveness of sins as he says in verse 77.**

The enemy from which we need saving is not outside of us, but inside. It's our sin from which we need saving. Now, this is not new. This forgiveness of sins was addressed in the Old Testament, as well. There were sin offerings (animal sacrifices) that were made, most commonly a lamb though sometimes other animals. But it was on the people to do this; they had to go and get the blemish-free animal for the sacrifice and bring it to the priest who would sacrifice the animal. All of this was part of their religious duties, on the shoulders of the people. What's new here in today's passage and that we see throughout the New Testament is that now, this saving and how it happens is God's doing. He takes the sacrifice part of the covenant and supplies it himself. And Zechariah is saying that John is going to have a key role in preparing the way for this to happen, by giving knowledge about the forgiveness of sins. That's going to be at the heart of his message: that people are sinners and forgiveness is needed. And, in John's ministry, we see him specifically preaching a message of repentance and pointing people to Jesus as the lamb of God.

For the Israelites, the anticipation of the Messiah, the one who would save them, was really focused on political deliverance. So, John is there to give them a new understanding of salvation: the enemy we need saving from is not outside of us, but inside, and Jesus is the Messiah who does this. John prepares the way for Jesus to save us and deliver us from the enemy inside.

So, let's boil this down to a couple of things. **First, Jesus is still in the business of salvation.** It's the gift he offers at Christmas, and every single day of the year. In Luke 19:10, Jesus says, "For the son of man (speaking of himself) came to seek and to save the lost." This is his mission. He offers salvation *from* our sin, and salvation *for* a relationship with God your heavenly father. For most of us here this morning, we know this, and we have a relationship with Jesus.

Perhaps for some of us, though, this is new news. Jesus calls it "good news." And that's what it is. In fact, it's great news! Our sin that separates us from God and makes an eternal relationship with our holy and righteous creator impossible, has been taken care of by Jesus. The stuff inside us that pollutes our souls and the consequences of that has been eradicated through Jesus. If salvation through faith in Jesus is new to you, I encourage you to turn away from your sin – that's what repent means – and invite Jesus into your life today, to experience and know the salvation of Jesus the Messiah. It's what leads to the peace that we celebrate on this 4th Sunday in Advent: peace with God, now and for eternity.

Second, for those of us who are already disciples of Jesus: **Second: We are all to be like John: preparing the way for Jesus, so this salvation through repentance and faith in Him would be received by others.** As some of you know, my wife, Gwen, has two older sisters. They each married a few years before Gwen and I did. And when Gwen and I married, I remember one of the other brothers-in-law coming to me and talking to me about marrying into this family of these three daughters, and the relationships I now had as a son-in-law. Here's what he said, "Brian, I just want you to know that when it comes to your new parents-in-law, I cleared all the brush and graded the dirt; your other brother-in-law came next and laid down the blacktop...all you

have to do is paint the lines. In other words: They did all the hard work of preparing the way for me to have a good relationship with my in-laws. And though Gwen's dad has passed away, I had a great relationship with him, and still do with her mom. The way was well-prepared for me.

Similarly, we are called to prepare the way for Jesus to move and minister in people's lives. In the language of the vision of our church, "preparing the way" is part of leading others toward Jesus. **John the Baptist led people toward Jesus by preparing the way for Jesus, and we can do the same.** We have opportunities to do this all the time. When you simply share with someone that you're a follower of Jesus even in a simple way like mentioning on Monday that you went to church as one of the things you did over the weekend...when you share even simply like that, you prepare the way for Jesus to come into their lives. When you demonstrate the fruit of the spirit to someone – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – especially in situations where most people would react in the opposite manner, then you help prepare the way for Jesus to come into their life. When you forgive someone of their sin against you or offer grace for a mistake or misunderstanding, you prepare the way for Jesus to come into their life. When you bring someone to a church service, you prepare the way for Jesus to come into their life. When you offer to pray for someone when they're hurting, you prepare the way for Jesus to come into their life. When you serve someone (like a neighbor)...when you do something kind for them and expect nothing in return, you prepare the way for Jesus to come into their life.

So, back to the question I started with: Who are you going to be? I pray that "disciple of Jesus" is the answer, and that you're preparing the way for Jesus to come into other people's lives. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We want to help others know salvation through faith in Jesus. It's the gift that God gives, and I pray we would receive it this Christmas, and be part of delivering this gift to others as well. Let's pray...Amen.