



## The Herald of Christmas Is Born

Luke 1:57-80

### Icebreaker

As you begin the discussion portion of your group, take a few minutes to break the ice and get everyone talking. Either use these questions or come up with your own.

1. What has been your favorite Christmas gift?
2. Is there any special circumstances surrounding your birth or the birth of any of your children?

### Series Overview

Week 3 of our Advent series this year will be focusing in on the birth of John the Baptist. Over the next few weeks we will be seeing how he was the herald of Christmas. It is through the life of John the Baptist that the way to Jesus was prepared. Join us as we unlock important themes such as pointing to Jesus, waiting for the Lord, and how a great man and prophet pointed us to someone greater than himself. Ultimately we will learn that we too are to point others to Christ this season.

### Context

At this point, Luke recorded the fulfillment of the birth announcement concerning John the Baptist (1:5–25). In the following account he continued the Jesus–John the Baptist parallelism by recording Jesus’ birth. This week we are looking at the birth of John the Baptist. We will be seeing the naming of John the Baptist, a short

narrative that sets the scene for a lengthy prophetic song. Zechariah's song takes up most of this section. It celebrates the birth of John, suggesting an answer to the people's question "What then is this child going to be?" Luke wanted his readers to understand this as Zechariah's divinely inspired hymn praising God for fulfilling his promises to his people and describing the roles of John the Baptist and especially the Messiah.

## Historical and Cultural Background

"John" was a common Jewish name, especially in priestly families, though apparently not in Zechariah's family. But names were sometimes chosen for their apparent meaning, in relation to the circumstances of the child's birth. "John" (Greek *Iōannēs*, representing the Hebrew *Yohanan*) was understood to mean "God is/has been gracious," and Zechariah's song takes up that theme. The announcement of this symbolic name by Gabriel superseded family tradition.

## Key Themes of Luke 1:57–80

- Zechariah and Elizabeth's insistence on the name "John," given by the angel, shows that this child is not an ordinary member of the family.
- The restoration of Zechariah's speech marks a new beginning.
- Zechariah's song (the Benedictus) continues Mary's theme of God's fulfillment of his saving purpose.
- John's own role is again described as the forerunner of God's salvation; he prepares people for the true dawn that is coming.

## Passage

### Out loud, read Luke 1:57-80

*57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." 61 And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.*

### *Zechariah's Prophecy*

*67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,*

*68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people*

*69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,*

*70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

*71 that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;*

*72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers*

*and to remember his holy covenant,*

*73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us*

*74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,*

*75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

*76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;*

*for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

*77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people*

*in the forgiveness of their sins,*

*78 because of the tender mercy of our God,*

*whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high*

*79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,*

*to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

*80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

## Discuss

- 1. Consider (vv. 57–66): What can we learn from these verses about the culture of Elizabeth’s day? How do these events serve as a prelude to the life and ministry of Jesus?**
- 2. We all have times of doubt and skepticism that can give way to faith and obedience. Where have you seen God move you from doubt and skepticism to faith and obedience?**
- 3. What are some specific promises that God has fulfilled in your life?**
- 4. As we go through these dark times, how can you let Jesus’ life shine in your community?**
- 5. What can we do to prepare for the Lord spiritually?**
- 6. How can you point others to the Lord this Advent season?**

## Next Steps

At the end of your time together, allow five minutes of silent contemplation. Think of it as your permission to do nothing but sit at Jesus’ feet. Contemplate the following question:

- What can you do to prepare the way for Christ to move into your life this season?**
- Find one way to share the light and hope of Jesus to someone this week.**

- Even though we were in Luke 1:57-80, take a look at Luke 1:46-56. Set aside some time for worship (vv. 46–56): Read Mary’s song of praise out loud multiple times. As you speak the words, make them a prayer. Allow yourself to remember the ways God has blessed you in recent months, and express your thanks to God for those gifts.

As you close your group time, end with prayer for one another and for those around you.

## **Family Component**

Be sure to check out our website for activities to do this week with your family.

## **Reading Plan**

For further reading look for the reading plan at:

<https://cornerstonenj.org/2020/11/23/herald-of-christmas-reading-plan/>