**Christmas According to Luke**

**The Announcement of the Birth of John the Baptist**

**Luke 1:5-25**

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 This is the first message in our advent series, looking at the events leading up to the birth of Jesus, the Savior of the World. Advent recognizes that we are a people who live between the times, we celebration of the birth of Christ in humility and we long the return of Christ in glory when he consummate his kingdom. This week we look at the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. Luke’s readers know John the Baptist, but Luke wants them to know about the miraculous nature of his birth. John comes to prepare people for the first coming of Jesus. Luke wants us to see that God overcomes impossible obstacles to accomplish his purposes like the birth of John the Baptist. My big idea today is that God overcomes impossible obstacles to accomplish his purposes Announcement.

God uses Insignificant People (5-7)

 First, we see that the events surrounding the Christmas story are rooted in history. It was a dark time for Israel. Their king, Herod, was appointed by Rome who demanded his loyalty. Israel is under Roman rule and longed for a Deliverer. But their greatest need was not political but spiritual, they needed deliverance from spiritual barrenness pictured in the barrenness of Elizabeth (7). And their deliverance would come from an unlikely source, through those who are insignificant in the eyes of the world. All the characters of the Christmas story are insignificant in the eyes of the world. So, Luke turns our attention to a priest, Zechariah, and his wife Elizabeth. As Jews in the priestly line, they are connected to Israel’s history. They are faithful Jews, righteous before God, walking blamelessly to the law. But they know of the suffering one experiences in a fallen and broken world, they are childless. They prayed for years for a child, but they are barren and are now past childrearing age. Any hope they had has been extinguished. Luke wants us to see parallels with the barrenness of the Patriarchs. Abraham’s wife Sarah was barren and past childrearing age, yet God fulfilled his promise of a son in a miraculous way. God is about to act and has put circumstances in place to accomplish his purpose in their lives, yet they are oblivious to it. I had a friend who I planted a church with. He was unassuming, insignificant in the eyes of the world, who you looked at not because he was impressive but because he was little, he was a dwarf. Yet because of his life circumstances, growing up in and out of the hospital his whole childhood, he became an amazing hospital chaplain. People often think that God cannot use them because of their past, because of their inadequacies, and because of they are unqualified, (fill in the blank). Yet here we see a big God using insignificant and little people to accomplish his purposes. He does this because it highlights human inability and his great ability. It highlights how small we are and how big God is (Rom 4:18-20). This story is your story and my story.

God Overcomes Impossible Obstacles (8-20)

 Luke shows us that God was at work in John’s birth. Zechariah and Elizabeth are barren and past childbearing age. Zechariah is chosen by lot to burn the incense, a once in a lifetime opportunity. While he is inside the temple, the angel of the Lord, Gabriel, announces John’s miraculous birth, and God names him and describes his destiny. God has heard Zechariah’s prayer (13)! When Zechariah’s hope for a son had flickered out, when it becomes unbelievable, he is promised a son (18). God is at work to overcome human inadequacies to accomplish his purposes in their lives that will send ripples into eternity. I was up at Beyer Lake this summer. It is not large, but it is deep and holds lake trout. The lake was still that day until I stepped into water and dropped my kayak. The impact on the water sent ripples in all directions. Some of the ripples hit the shore quickly but others moved across the lake until I lost sight of them. Those ripples impacted everything in their path, vegetation, fallen trees, and a lone loon. The ripples impacted objects that I will never know about because it was beyond my sight. In the same way, God is at work in your life to influence others in ways you see be but also in ways you will never see or know about.

 John will be a joy and delight to Zechariah and Elizabeth. They will be happy because God has been merciful to them in giving them a son. Yet the joy of being parents will be overshadowed by the joy because John will be great before the Lord. His greatness will not come from his standing in society or in Judaism, it will be because he prepares a people ready for the Lord in the spirit and power of the Old Testament prophet Elijah (15-17). He will prepare people for the coming of the Lord, Israel’s deliverer. Think Exodus. Think of Israel’s song of celebration in Exodus 15 for God delivering them through the Red Sea. John will precede and prepare the way for the Lord (see Mark 1:1-8; John 1:29-34). This is good news (19)! The prayer of this insignificant couple for a son is being answered in a way that far exceeds their expectations. John will create a ripple that will reverberate across Israel and the nations! God is working to overcome impossible obstacles to prepare the way for the Lord, who is Jesus Christ.

 Zechariah did not believe the good news the angel gave despite having so many reasons to believe. The angel appeared to him, as priest he knew angelic encounters pointed to God’s intervention, and the angel told him John’s name and destiny. Yet Zechariah wanted more evidence, how can I be sure of this (18)? It is not that he could not believe but that he would not believe. Yet his wife Elizabeth conceived in fulfillment of the promise (24). God is saying I can and love to do the humanly impossible: trust me. God is at work for your good and his glory. He is working for your joy even in the barren seasons of life. This is an important truth to see, we live by faith not by sight. Christmas reminds us that when hope is diminished, circumstances seem insurmountable, when God’s purposes seem lost in your life, in our world, God’s purposes and our joy in God are intertwined and indestructible. History is guided by the sovereign hand of God; your life is guided by the sovereign hand of God and that is a source of great joy each one of us.

**Life Group Questions:**

Head

1. Describe some experience that made you really happy or was really difficult.
2. Have you ever experienced unanswered prayer or that was not answered the way you wanted?

Describe.

1. Why is life so painful sometimes?
2. Why do you think it was difficult for Zechariah to believe the angel despite all the incentives?

Heart

1. Have you ever experienced situation that seemed hopeless but God intervened? Describe.
2. How did that experience make you feel?
3. What does it means that we are to live by faith not by sight? Why is that so difficult at times?
4. Why do you think God likes to work in and through the insignificant and little people?

Hand

1. John the Baptist pointed people to Jesus. Do you have a hard time pointing people to Jesus?

How can we overcome these feelings?

1. Is there a seemingly impossible obstacle in your life you need God to over come?
2. How is God asking me to respond?