



Sunday 29th November 2020
Welcome to our Sunday Service
The Birth of John the Baptist
Prepared by Mervyn

God has a plan for you, by Marilyn Baker

God has a plan for you ,something only you can do

You are so valuable to Him.

You are beyond compare

A priceless jewel so very rare

He gave just everything to make you his own

Chorus

God wants just you, yes no one else will do

Listen to Him call you by name

You were in His plan before the world began

And he longs that you live your life for Him

He knows the power of sin

The struggles that you have within

His love just longs to set you free

And as you open up your heart

And give to him every part

He'll make you all you long to be

You have a part to play in spreading His love today

To those who live in so much need

By using those who belong to Him

Who are ready to give Him everything

So He can live and speak through them.

**A very Happy Birthday
to Owain (2nd Dec)**

**Have a great day and
God Bless you!**



Heavenly Father. Thank you that you are a God of compassion and grace, that you see into the depths of our lives, and know us completely. We ask that your love would continue to grow in all our lives, and drive out the fear that can cripple us at times.

Father we pray for our community at this time, for people who are struggling with the difficulties of this pandemic, and especially those who are grieving. May we overflow with your love to those around us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Christmas time is upon us! I visited a large garden centre recently, and was amazed at the huge display of Christmas decorations, but within the vast range of decorations I only managed to find one item connected to the true story of Christmas, which got me thinking. It's impossible to over celebrate the true meaning of Christmas, but it is possible to forget what we're celebrating!!



Today, let's start our Christmas celebrations by looking at a part of the story that is often overlooked. I want us to spend some time thinking about the other baby in the Christmas story, John the Baptist. I hope that as we reflect on this unique character, we will connect more deeply with God's heart for each of us, and bask in his loving care. I want us to think about:

1, The reflection of God's heart through loving parents

2, The compassion of God across the generations

3, The loyalty of God in relationships

John the Baptist is one of the people I'm really looking forward to meeting, and getting to know one day. He is a fascinating character, and had a head start in life that is only matched by a couple of other biblical characters, like Samson or Isaac. Although he had a special head start in life, I believe God would want each of us to tap into the beautiful implications of this advantage and receive aspects of them for ourselves.



- ◆ **His birth was foretold by the Angel Gabriel**
- ◆ **His birth was a miracle**
- ◆ **He experienced the emotion of joy while still in the womb**
- ◆ **His Father publicly sang over him with delight, joy and pride**
- ◆ **He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth.**
- ◆ **The whole community around him were delighted by his arrival**
- ◆ **His life mission was foretold in the Old Testament**

Here are some verses from Luke Ch 1 that tell his story

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

8Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.



11Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

18Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

19The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”

21Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25“The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

Then later in Luke Ch 1 after the Angel Gabriel had visited her, Mary goes to visit her relative Elizabeth, and this is what Elizabeth says to her.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!”



Later in the chapter Zachariah bursts into a song of praise to God, and delights over his son, you can read this in verses 67-79.

In this text we see God fulfilling his promise to send a forerunner to prepare the way for Jesus, someone to blaze a trail for Jesus, and awaken the people to the coming of the Messiah.

Let's think about our first point. The Reflection of God's Heart through Parenting

I am struck by the love and support structures God has in place for John to be born into. A devout and faithful couple who to this point have been unable to have children, but are now overjoyed to suddenly welcome this little person into their lives, so much so that dad bursts into song! Not only them, but the whole community around them are also thrilled at his arrival.



What a welcome to planet earth!

I wonder what your arrival on earth was like?

Some of us have shared a similar welcome into a family or community, but sadly many of us have not. Some of us have been born into families where we often sensed we were not really wanted, or perhaps resented by one parent. Some of us were born to parents who were struggling with their own brokenness, and we got harmed. Sometimes we may grow up with a step -parent that treats us differently to the other children, or perhaps we know that we are not the gender our parents would have liked. Lots of us carry a sense of disappointment that we picked up from our parents somewhere along the line. Maybe we grew up in the foster care system, and there's a painful question at the very core of us, 'Why wasn't I wanted?' As humans we are all fallen and broken and we pass this brokenness on to others.



Elizabeth and Zachariah were also not perfect parents, and would have made mistakes, but we see in this model the heart of God for little people, and big people!

As we come to him as our Heavenly Father, he welcomes us into his family and begins to restore the damaged and neglected areas in our lives. This can take time and involve a healing journey with Jesus. When we come to God as OUR FATHER, he sings a song of delight over us and celebrates that we have come to him. For me it's not a literal song that I hear in my head, but the accumulation of little things that fit my situation, that show he cares about every detail of my life, like little targeted drops of love that hit the exact spot! For example, a Bible verse that speaks into a specific issue in my life, or a surprise gift that comes along at just the right time to meet a need. When we start to recognise these little targeted drops of love, they start to form a song that heals our pain, and soothes our anxiety. I pray that you may be aware of a targeted drop of God's love in your life and metaphorically hear Him singing, "My son" or "My daughter" over you! As a church we want to be a place where people experience God's delight over their being.

The next thing I want to think about is the compassion of God across the generations

The mission that John was born to fulfil was prophesied hundreds of years earlier. In Isaiah 40:3 it talks about a voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Since the dawn of time, God had planned to come and live among us, and John's life began at just the right time for him to fulfil this mission to prepare the way for Jesus. Everyone in John's family tree was an essential link to him being born at that time, no one in his family tree was a mistake! Sometimes we may feel like we are a mistake, but the Bible tells us in Acts 17:26, From one human being he created all races of people and made them live throughout the whole earth. He himself fixed before hand the exact times and the limits of the places where they would live. God doesn't make mistakes!

The thing that really jumps out at me is that the unborn baby John experiences emotion. In the text Elizabeth says that the baby in her womb leapt for joy when he heard Mary's greeting! Modern research is discovering more and more fascinating things about emotions and the unborn child. How wonderful that the Bible gives us this little insight, but how much more wonderful to know that God understands even these deep rooted emotions and has compassion.



For pregnant mothers who experience domestic abuse the womb can be a place of violence for the unborn child. Sometimes substance abuse can harm a baby, and sadly abortion is the ultimate horror for the unborn baby.

Psalms 139 is a celebration of God at work in the womb. We can be confident that he knows and understands each of us right from our very beginning. His compassion reaches to the depths of our beings and across the generations. Like John who was born at just the right time, you too can be confident that God brought you along at just the right time to play your part in his story.

The third thing that blesses me connected to John the Baptist is the loyalty of God in relationships

John the Baptist grows up and goes on to fulfil his mission by preparing the way for Jesus. He lives an incredible season of his life in the desert where he wears clothes made of camel hair and eats locusts and honey, a bit like a first century Bear Grylls! He fearlessly preaches repentance from the things that lead us away from God. Another part of his ministry is to restore the heart connections between fathers and children, this is prophesied in both Malachi 4:6 and Luke 1:17.

I have been aware again this week of the huge and crippling father wounds that so many of us carry in our lives.

Through Jesus, these painful wounds can ultimately be addressed as Jesus leads us into his fathers heart. John also leaves us with some incredible statements about Jesus, such as; “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” and “He must increase and I must decrease.” Gradually, Jesus’s ministry does increase and John’s ministry does decrease to the point where he is thrown into prison for telling Herod some home truths.

So he finds himself in prison, and as he is worn down by prison, some little doubts start to rise. You can read all about this in Luke 7:18-35. John sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”



WHAT?? After John has baptised Jesus, and heard the voice from heaven, been filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and had the most amazing start in life... He experiences doubt!

I hope this gives you comfort. Here we are in another lockdown (mini prison) and I know for some of us this is a time when all kinds of doubts can arise. Is God really in control? Can I trust him for my life, my family, my finances, my future? You are not alone, even John the Baptist needed reassurance.

And what I really, really love from this is the response of Jesus when he hears what John asks of him. Jesus **doesn't** say, “Oh well, I’m really disappointed in John. Of all people, I’d have thought he’d have more faith!”

What Jesus actually says is quite the opposite! He publicly underlines everything good about John, elevates him, and sends him a message of reassurance that ministers into his doubt.

We see here that Jesus is utterly loyal to his followers. You can be assured from this that it’s ok to experience doubt, and if you take your doubts to Jesus he will not reject you. In fact the Bible describes him as a friend that sticks closer than a brother. We follow a wonderful God!



Let's recap the special events at the beginning of John's life and apply them to ourselves

His birth was foretold by the Angel Gabriel

The Bible assures us that God knew about each of us before the creation of the world. Our births may not have been announced by an angel, but we were just as known by God!

His birth was a miracle

Yes, his birth was a miracle due to the old age of his mother, but there is also the awesome sense of a miracle whenever you hold a new born baby, and once that was you!! You are a miracle—the odds of you being you, are 1 in 400 trillion according to scientists!

He experienced the emotion of joy while still in the womb

We may carry the echo of a different emotion in the depths of our lives. If it is a negative emotion, God's love can reach right back to that place and bring peace. It matters to him and he understands.

His Father publicly sang over him with delight, joy and pride

Even if our earthly fathers did not delight in us, our heavenly Father sings over us. In Zephaniah 3:17 it says "that He rejoices over you with singing."

He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth.

God fills us and refills us as we come to Him, and at times he gives us a special anointing for a particular task!

The whole community around him were delighted by his arrival

We see a community of celebration at the return of the lost sheep, and the repentance of the prodigal son. God goes after the individual who is lost, in order to bring them home. May we as a church be a community of celebration that delights in the individual when they come home, and the goodness of God, rejoicing at what he's doing, in and through our lives.



His life mission was foretold in the Old Testament

Our mission may not be spelt out in the Old Testament, but Ephesians 2:10 says "...we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God does have a plan for our lives!

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of
The Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.**