

## Behold! A Baby Leaps for Joy Luke 1:39-45, 57-66

### Introduction

This is the second Sunday in Advent and the second in our series of sermons on the story of Jesus. As you know, our key word is:

### BEHOLD!

We are defining this hard to define word as like this:

*Stop what you are doing! Pay attention! Something important is happening right now. You don't want to miss it.*

Our goal in this series is to tell the story of Jesus – particular the part of the story that focuses on what we know about Him up to the point He begins His ministry. So, prenatal up to His baptism.

Throughout the story of Jesus – and particularly in the stories surrounding his birth and childhood – that wonderful word “Behold!” appears to focus our attention on a piece of information we might otherwise easily miss. So, whenever a “behold” appears, we want to investigate it a little more closely, lest we miss the point.

Did you hear the “behold!” when I read the Gospel lesson today? Elizabeth speaks it to Mary there in Luke 1:44:

*Behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. (Luke 1:44)*

A baby leaps for joy! Now, that would be easy to miss, wouldn't it? We will come to know this child as “John the Baptist.” But long before he gains that nickname, John the baby ... jumps for joy.

There is a great question asked at the end of our reading today. I want to use it as the basic outline for my message today. You will find it in Luke 1:66:

*What will this child turn out to be? (Luke 1:66)*

Our text reveals three answers:

### **ANSWER #1: HE WAS THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE**

I go back into the reading from Isaiah to set the stage for this first answer:

*A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)*

This leaping baby is the one sent by God to get people's hearts ready to receive the coming Messiah. The Gospel writers will all apply this Isaiah passage to John as his ministry begins. Luke does so two chapters after the text we read a few moments ago:

*The word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. And he came into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "The voice of one calling out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!'" (Luke 3:3-4)*

This is the same John who will one day, 30 years after leaping in the womb, baptize Jesus in the Jordan River and thus launch the three year ministry of Jesus. We will cover that story on the second Sunday of January (and the final sermon in this series).

- Likewise this leaping baby is same John who will lose his head because he dared to point out a major sin in the life of King Herod.

Hundreds of years before this leaping event, millions of Jews began anticipating the arrival of this little boy. Clearly John was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

But there is another, more recent prophecy I want you to remember as well. Earlier in chapter 1, John's dad, Zechariah, was serving as the "priest of the day." This was a great honor – a once in a lifetime event. While there in the Holy of Holies, the angel Gabriel appears to him. I love how the text describes Zechariah's reaction:

*Zechariah was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. (Luke 1:12)*

What a wonderfully understated reaction! In this visit, the angel Gabriel told Zechariah he was going to be a daddy. And, more importantly, he told Zechariah who his son will be. Listen to these words from Luke 1:17:

*And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers back to their children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:17)*

That should have been received as really good news, because the text tells us that Zechariah and Elizabeth had been praying for just such an announcement. But it doesn't quite turn out that way. The text also tells us that Zechariah and Elizabeth were beyond child bearing years. Just as it was with Mary in last week's message, this baby-to-be was a biological impossibility.

- When Mary heard the impossible words spoken to her, she said, "I don't understand, but I believe."
- When Zechariah heard his impossible words, he said, "You will have to prove it to me before I will believe it."

As proof, the angel took away Zechariah's ability to speak... until that leaping baby was born.

So rather than just the 700 year old fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, this leaping baby was also the fulfillment of a 9 month old prophecy made by an angel to a unbelieving father.

What will this child turn out to be? The fulfillment of two promises made by God to His people.

## **ANSWER #2: HE POINTED PEOPLE TO JESUS**

Please look closely at verse 41:

*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:41)*

Notice the sequence:

- Mary says "hello."
- The baby (John) jumps for joy
- Elizabeth is filled with the spirit

The result of her filling is that she understands who the baby is in the womb of Mary. Verse 43:

*And how has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me? (Luke 1:43)*

The mission of John was to "prepare the way for Jesus." He starts fulfilling that mission before he is ever born! I find that to be amazing!

There is a fascinating story that happens about 30 years after this leaping baby event.

- Jesus has just begun his ministry, and is baptizing people in the Judean countryside.
- At the same time, John is baptizing people in Aenon (not the Enon near here).
- Most of the people are going to the baptismal services of Jesus – so much so that the followers of John come to him to make sure he understands that this upstart is stealing his audience.

*"Teacher, are you aware that the One you told us about at the crossing place—he's now baptizing everyone with larger crowds than yours. People are flocking to him! What do you think about that?" (John 3:26)*

The response of John was simple:

*He must become greater; I must become less. (John 3:30)*

For six months, John was the miracle baby. The baby to be born to a pair of "past their prime" parents. And in a single leaping moment, John transfers the attention from himself to Jesus. Even in the womb, he points people to Jesus.

Yes, John is a miracle, but he is in the presence of a far greater miracle. John must decrease so that Jesus can increase.

What will this child turn out to be? The fulfillment of two promises made by God to His people AND the one who points people to Jesus at all times. And finally:

### **ANSWER #3: HE WITNESSED TO GOD'S GOODNESS**

Verse 63:

*"His name is John." (Luke 1:63)*

Choosing a name for your baby is always a big deal. That was especially true when the new baby was a boy and the location was first century Palestine. Boys were not named until eight days later when the rite of circumcision was held, so there was plenty of time for choosing the right name. And there were many voices who had opinions about what that name should be!

Our text tells us that the neighbors and relatives of Zechariah and Elizabeth had all gathered and decided amongst themselves that this baby should be named: Zechariah ... after his daddy. Zack Jr.

*And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zechariah, after his father. (Luke 1:59)*

That seems a bit presumptuous to me, but evidently that was the norm for that day and age. Remember, Zechariah couldn't talk, so at first no one asked for his opinion, as if he wasn't even in the room.

But Elizabeth objected. No, she said, we are naming him John. She doesn't say "because the angel told us to name him John." These friends and relatives already thought she was crazy to give him a name other than the one they had decided on, so the angel story would have only made matters worse. "You can't do that!" they told her.

*"There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name. (Luke 1:61)*

Thinking that every father would like to have a junior in the house, they finally asked Zechariah for his opinion. He still couldn't speak, but they gave him a tablet and he wrote these words:

*"HIS NAME IS **JOHN**." (Luke 1:63)*

I think they were in all capital letters. This leaping baby was thus given a name all his own – a name not to be shared with anyone else in the family.

The name John means:

*God is good.*

### **APPLICATION**

Last week, we talked about how the name of Jesus means "The Lord is my Savior." I emphasized how our world needed desperately to know that message. The Savior has come!

John's name carries another important message for our world. Our God is good. We don't have a God whose presence causes us to be afraid. He is not a God from whom we must hide. He is not a mean, angry God sitting in heaven waiting to squish you like a bug. He is good. He is gracious.

The Psalmist said this:

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.  
He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;  
he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities. (Psalm 103:8-10)*

Behold! A baby jumps, and proclaims before anyone else could that our God is good!  
Spread the word!

Amen.