

## Zechariah Speaks

I didn't know they still had 'Show and Tell' in schools," Natalie said as she watched her young friend's child glue the red heart on the poster board.

Latasia was both cutting out letters and watching her seven-year-old daughter, Chantele. She looked up and gave a smile to her older friend.

Natalie had been a constant source of godliness and strength in Latasia's life, and she was thankful. It was Natalie who recommended praying with Chantele when Nandi, their dear pet, ran away. Nandi was a one-year-old Lab and Pit Bull mix. Nandi had been missing for four days, and Natalie feared he had been stolen. After Latasia and Chantele pasted flyers around town and on social media, Natalie recommended that Latasia pray with her daughter for Nandi's safe return.

In less than 24 hours, Latasia was contacted about where they could pick up Nandi. "See how God answered our prayer," Latasia said to her daughter. "When God blesses us, we should be grateful, praise His name, and tell others about it."

When Chantele told her mother about the "Show and Tell" assignment and asked if she could make a poster board thanking God for bringing Nandi home, Latasia actually leaped for joy. Some 40 minutes later, Natalie told Chantelle, "This is a beautiful thank You board," and then turned to Latasia. "But more importantly, you have been an example and sown something invaluable in your daughter's heart."

- 1.** *Who in your life has been an example and taught you to trust and glorify God?*
- 2.** *What does it mean to glorify God?*
- 3.** *How does reading Scripture prepare us to teach others about God?*

## The Birth of John the Baptist

*Luke 1:57-61, KJV*

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

*Luke 1:57-61, NIV*

<sup>57</sup>When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

<sup>58</sup>Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

<sup>59</sup>On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, <sup>60</sup>but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

<sup>61</sup>They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Elizabeth's friends and family heard the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy and were elated. When the baby was delivered full term (in an age of high infant mortality), they had even more reason to celebrate.

In keeping with the covenant with Abraham and the laws of Moses around the practice, baby John was circumcised on the eighth day of his life. If a baby lived at least eight days, there was a high chance that the infant was going to survive, so parents would often wait at least eight days to name the child. Of course, everyone in the crowd who was supporting Elizabeth expected the boy to be named after his dad, Zechariah. But Elizabeth corrected the false expectation and insisted his name was to be John.

Keep in mind, Zechariah was still mute at this time. He had been unable to speak for nine months. But even

though Zechariah could not speak, that did not mean he did not communicate to his wife everything that the angel Gabriel had told him. Later, when the crowd wanted to hear from Zechariah, he asked for a writing tablet. From this we can surmise that Zechariah already communicated with Elizabeth by writing out his thoughts and responses.

**4.** *Why was there a great celebration when John was born?*

**5.** *Why did the crowd question Elizabeth's choice of a name for the baby?*

## **Zechariah Speaks**

*Luke 1:62-66, KJV*

62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.

66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

*Luke 1:62-66, NIV*

<sup>62</sup>Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. <sup>63</sup>He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John."

<sup>64</sup>Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup>All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. <sup>66</sup>Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

The crowd started making signs to Zechariah to see

what the boy should be named. The types of signs they made in order to communicate their question may have been nothing more than just pointing to the baby.

As was his custom during his involuntary vow of silence, Zechariah asked for a tablet upon which to write. The tablet he requested was likely made of either clay or wax so that it could receive writing with the use of a stylus and could be “erased” by smoothing out the letters.

When Zechariah received the tablet, he made it clear to the astonished crowd that his baby’s name was to be John.

The priest’s time of discipline was over, and he was finally able to speak. The first thing he did was to begin praising God. The crowd witnessed this healing firsthand and were once again astonished by what they were seeing. Clearly the hand of God was on what would become of the child in the future.

**6.** *What happened when Zechariah confirmed the name of the baby as John?*

**7.** *What was the crowd’s response to the priest’s sudden ability to speak again?*

## **Zechariah’s Prediction**

*Luke 1:76-79, KJV*

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

*Luke 1:76-79, NIV*

<sup>76</sup>“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;

for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

<sup>77</sup>to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

<sup>78</sup>because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

come to us from heaven  
<sup>79</sup>to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

The priest called the crowd to worship the God who had returned to His people to redeem them. He called attention to past times where God had redeemed His people (in the earthly sense) and that now He had a plan to save their souls. The words of this Spirit-inspired psalm would give His people courage to face the sometimes difficult consequences of God’s rescue and restoration.

Zechariah then turned his attention to his son and pronounced a prophetic blessing over him. John would be called the “prophet of the Most High” (vs. 76), preparing the hearts of the people to receive the message of the Messiah. The priest made it clear that the salvation of Israel, and the souls of those who made up God’s people, rested solely in the hands of the Messiah. The forgiveness of God was based upon His compassion and mercy. Those for whom this forgiveness would become real would experience it through the personal acknowledgement of their sins and heartfelt repentance.

Zechariah used a metaphor of the rising sun to illustrate how God’s grace will come upon those who look to the heavens for God’s deliverance. The light of the Messiah would shine within the dark souls of those wrapped up in their sins and the looming prospect of death without being reconciled with God. But now they could rejoice! The path of peace would be laid out in front of them as John would cultivate the hearts of people to receive the Messiah.

**8.** *What was the title that Zechariah predicted his son would be called?*

**9.** *How did Zechariah describe his son’s eventual ministry?*

## Bringing Glory to God

John was born for a specific purpose, to prepare people's hearts for the Messiah's message of repentance and salvation. We have a similar purpose once we have been born into God's family as believers. Our new mission in life is to help people become ready or able to receive the good news of Jesus' sacrificial death for our sins and offer of reconciliation to God.

The angel declared the unique circumstances of John's birth, as well as his God-ordained ministry. Zechariah questioned this message, and received God's discipline—he lost his ability to speak until after he declared the name God had given his newborn son. Once Zechariah regained his speech, he praised and glorified God. Zechariah's song made it clear that the miracles of John's birth and his own healing came from God. The Bible tells us that God disciplines those He loves (Proverbs 3:12, Hebrews 12:6). We can learn from Zechariah not to question God's word. We also learn to accept discipline. One way we glorify—give honor and glory to—God is to point out to others the amazing things God has done.

Zechariah's song arises out of his faith that God would heal him and remove the discipline at the proper time. The song glorifies God for Who He is and what He has done. In only a few words, Zechariah mentioned God's plan of salvation and restoration because of His great mercy and compassion.

**10.** *What can we do to help people become ready (prepared) to receive the good news about God's Messiah?*

**11.** *Why is it important to accept God and His Word, that He will do what He says He will do?*

**12.** *What does our ministry as believers have in common with John's God-ordained mission?*

**13.** *How has God's mercy, compassion, plan of salvation, and restoration made a difference in your life?*

## Reaching Out to Teach

Zechariah taught others to glorify God by his example when he sang a song of praise. We teach whenever we show or explain how to do something to someone.

► *Reflect on these questions and write your answers below.*

*How can you lead by example to show someone how to glorify God?*

*What is one thing you will do this week to teach others to glorify God Most High?*

### KEY VERSE

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.

—Luke 1:76, KJV

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.

—Luke 1:76, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of December 12 through December 18

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** John 1:1-14—The Word Became Flesh.

**Tues.** John 1:15-28—John's Testimony.

**Wed.** John 1:29-42—Here Is the Lamb of God!

**Thurs.** John 1:43-51—Come and See!

**Fri.** Isaiah 40:1-11—Prepare the Way of the Lord.

**Sat.** Isaiah 40:21-31—Know and Hear!

**Sun.** Luke 3:2b-6, 15-18—John's Confession.