

Called to Proclaim

Key Verse: *“His mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.”*
—Luke 1:64

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:57-80

FROM THE TIME WHEN

the promise of a son was given to Zacharias, until the fulfillment (Luke 1:64), he was unable to speak due to his doubt concerning God’s word as delivered by the angel. If his faith was to be tested, it must have been found to be strong, and was apparently assisted by the nine-month-long experience of being unable to talk. It certainly must have been difficult for him due to his office as a priest, and the years of providing service to the people in the Temple of the Lord.

Elisabeth had given birth to a son, who was provided to her in answer to prayer. It was a gift from God, in part due to their loving heart disposition. So it appears evident that the preparation for John’s ministry began before he was born, in the hearts of his parents. Friends, neighbors and relatives were gladdened by the event, realizing that “the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her.” (vs. 58) This rejoicing was also proclaimed by Gabriel, when he had spoken the words, “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord.”—vs. 15

In harmony with the message, John the Baptist was born. On the eighth day, he was circumcised and would be named. The relatives of the family urged them to use the name of his father, even calling him Zacharias, but it was not meant to be so. Mary answered the people

saying, "He shall be called John." (vs. 60) They would then appeal to Zacharias, "They made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John." (vss. 62,63) Immediately his mouth was opened, and he was able to speak. Again his faith had been helped. He had gained a victory over his doubts, and it culminated with the giving of the name that was desired by God for him. The name John has a beautiful meaning—"the favor of God." He has often been referred to as the forerunner of Christ, to prepare the way for his great work. That work would be to bring the knowledge of salvation to all of God's people. His mission was declared by Isaiah who referred to him as "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD."—Isa. 40:3-5

As a man, John was peculiar in that he had no other aim in life than to be God's messenger, to proclaim his anointed one, and to prepare the people for the difficult experiences which would come as a fulfillment of prophecy. Malachi had declared that these trials would come to them after the revealment of the Messiah, who would "sit as a refiner, . . . [to] purify the sons of Levi." (Mal. 3:3) It was for this reason that John in his ministry declared, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:2) "He came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." (Luke 3:3) Repent, reform, and get ready for a share in that kingdom.

A further illustration of the importance of John's birth is found in the words spoken by Zacharias, being filled with the Holy Spirit, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people." (Luke 1:68) Praise is first given to God, thanking him for giving his great blessings, which would eventually deliver all of his people from sin and death. The first step towards Israel's deliverance had been taken. ■