

THE WORD BECAME FLESH



CREATION AND THE BEGINNING OF HUMAN HISTORY

#02 – The Birth of John the Baptist Luke 1:5-25, 57-66

PICTURES (Note: Inserted in brackets at the appropriate place in the lesson is the number of the picture to show the students.)

- 2-1 John the Baptist
- 2-2 Angel Gabriel speaking to Zechariah

REVIEW (Before Teaching Lesson)

- **Journal Review:** Ask students to share an important truth that they learned from their journal readings at home that week. Share some of your own insights.
- **Previous Lesson Review:** (Use the visual from the last lesson to aid in review) What should the words of a prophet do? What are five Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah? How do we know Jesus is the Messiah?
- **Big Question Review:** Who is Jesus?
Let the students give their answers to the question.
- **Bible Verse Review:** John 1:14
Jesus is the Word of God who came to live among us and reveal God's glory.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

LESSON CONTENT

Note: The Bible verses included in the lesson are from the NIV 1984 edition. The wording of the questions is derived from that version. If another version of the Bible is used, questions may need to be adapted.

As Christians we believe that Jesus is the Messiah (Savior) that God promised to send to the people of Israel. The Messiah would come to redeem all people and bring them back into a right relationship with God. The Old Testament contains many prophecies about the awaited Messiah. To be the Messiah Jesus had to fulfill those prophecies.

One prophecy was that before the Messiah came, Elijah the prophet would come first. Who was Elijah? Elijah was a great prophet whom God sent to Israel during the time of the very wicked King Ahab. He called the people back from the worship of false gods to the one true God. He was the prophet who called down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice during the contest with the prophets of Baal. He was also taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire.

The prophecy from Malachi 4:5-6 says, *⁵"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah before Jesus began his ministry. **(picture 2-1)** When John was asked if he was the Christ (Greek word for Messiah) he said he wasn't. He was then asked if he were Elijah and he said no. John quoted the prophet Isaiah and said (John 1:23), *"I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" What does that mean?* John was sent to call people back to the Lord. He was to make them aware of their need for a savior.

When Jesus was asked about John he said, (Matthew 11:13-15) *¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵He who has ears, let him hear. What is Jesus saying about John?* Jesus said that people who had hearts to receive the truth would understand who John was and what he had come to do.

The Gospel of Luke begins with the miraculous story of John's birth.

Luke 1: 5-7

⁵ 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. ⁶ Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. ⁷ But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

What was noteworthy about John's parents? Zechariah and Elizabeth faithfully served God. Even in the midst of the heartache of not having children of their own, which was a big disgrace in their culture, they trusted God.

Luke 1: 8-17

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

(picture 2-2) ¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

¹³ But 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 give him the name John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for 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 from birth. ¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Why would people rejoice because of John's birth? He would touch the hearts of the people in a way that would cause them to turn back to God. There is no greater gift one person can give to another than that.

Luke 1: 18-22

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

¹⁹ The angel answered, "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. ²⁰ And 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 proper time."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When 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.

Who is Gabriel? Gabriel is an important angel who stands in the presence of God. God uses him as a messenger to proclaim to people what is to come.

Why did Zechariah doubt what Gabriel told him would happen? Zechariah is like all of us, he doubted the miraculous would happen. We think in terms of the natural world and the way it normally functions, not in terms of the power of God and what he is able to do. His wife Elizabeth was past the age of childbearing so he didn't believe she would ever be able to have a child.

Luke 1: 22-25, 57-66

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After 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 favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

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

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

⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

What caused the people to wonder what John would be? God testified that his hand was upon John by the miraculous events surrounding his birth. People could see that God was at work in his parents' and his life.

Zechariah then testified to both the coming of the Savior and his son's role in preparing the people. (Luke 1:76-78a) ⁷⁶ 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, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God.

What did Zechariah prophesy his son would do? His son would prepare the way for the Savior by causing people to recognize their sin and God's mercy and forgiveness.

LESSON WRAP-UP

- **Overview Questions:** Who was Zechariah? What did Gabriel tell him would happen? Why did he have a hard time believing what Gabriel said? What happened because he didn't trust Gabriel's message? What did Gabriel say John would do? What did Zechariah say his son would do?
- **Thought Questions:** Why did Luke give such a detailed account of John's birth? Why was it important for God to send a prophet to prepare the people? What do people need to recognize about themselves before they understand their need for a Savior?
- **Prayer:** Thank God for the truth contained in the Gospels that helps you to understand the fullness of all that he has done to draw people back to himself. Thank him for the prophets who point to him and tell us of our need for a savior. Pray that you would see your sin and recognize all that Jesus has done for you.
- **The Big Question: What was John the Baptist sent to do?**
Let the students give their answers to the question. Share the memory verse. Ask how it answers the question.

- **Memory Verse:** Luke 1:76-78a

John came to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus

⁷⁶ 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, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God.

Questions: Why would John be called a prophet? How would he do that?

ACTIVITIES (Completed after the lesson)

Any age appropriate activity can be included which fits into the class time. The activities with a star are included on the class notes.

- ★ **Lesson Notes:** Ask the students to summarize in one sentence what the lesson was about. Then have them give three main points covered in the lesson. An example is below.

Theme: John came before Jesus, was born in a miraculous way and was to make the people ready for the coming of the Savior.

1. Zechariah was visited by Gabriel as he was serving in the temple and told that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child, even though she was old and barren.
2. Because he didn't believe Gabriel Zechariah couldn't speak until the baby was born.
3. Both Zechariah and Gabriel testified that John would be a prophet to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Messiah.

Why do you need to know this? So we know that God can and does intervene to bring his will to pass.

- ★ **Memory Verse:** Read the memory verse on the cover of the class notes and then have the students fill in the blanks in the verse.

- ★ **Activity Page:** Crossword

Instructions: Fill in the crossword puzzle with the names and words from the reading

Barren – John's mother's condition before having him

Elizabeth – The name of John's mother

Zechariah – The name of John's father

Priest – The religious position John's father held

Gabriel – The angel that appeared to John's father

Elijah – the prophet who was to come before the Messiah

Speak – What John's father was unable to do until he was born

Temple – The place where the angel spoke to John's father.

★ **Further Understanding:** Investigation/Reasoning Skills

Instructions:

1. Read the whole passage below to the students as they read along in their Bibles or on the discussion notes.
2. Read the passage verse by verse and have the students explain each verse.
3. Have the students extract one important truth from the passage. This can be done as an entire class or you can break into pairs or small groups.
4. Have the students answer the additional two questions: How can you apply this truth in your life? What will be the result of applying that truth?

Luke 1:67-79 – The Prophecy of Zechariah

⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ⁶⁸ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—⁷² to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ 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, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Questions: What did Zechariah say God has done for his people? What is God's motivation for doing that? Why is that important to remember? What was to be John's role in preparation for the coming of the Messiah? Why was that important?

JOURNAL

The daily journal inside the booklet has six readings that relate to a theme. It would be beneficial for the teacher to work through the journal readings also.

Journal Focus: What do we need to understand about prophets?

Reading 1: Numbers 12:1-15 God generally speaks to prophets in dreams and visions. What was Miriam and Aaron's complaint? What was the difference between Moses and other prophets of God? What do you think the people learned from what happened to Miriam?

Reading 2: Deuteronomy 18:14-22 What a prophet speaks must come true. What did God say he would do for the people? How would the people know whether or not the prophet spoke from God?

Reading 3: Deuteronomy 13:1-5 False prophets are to be put to death. What kind of prophet was God warning the people about? Why were they to put that kind of prophet to death?

Reading 4: Ezekiel 2:1-9 Prophets are to speak whether or not anyone listens.
How did God describe the Israelites? What was he sending Ezekiel to do?

Reading 5: Ezekiel 13:1-6 False prophets will lead people astray.
Why did God condemn the prophets of Israel? Why were the prophets and Israel like a white-washed wall?

Reading 6: 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 The gift of prophecy is given to edify others.
What does someone who prophesies do for others?