

"Great Expectations in John the Baptizer?"—Luke 1:57-67

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Great Expectations in John the Baptizer?", is Luke 1:57-67 → *The time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Great expectations! You have them after months of planning that perfect vacation. Couples experience them after months, even years of planning for the big wedding day. College graduates take them into their new careers after years of study and preparation. Pastors have them as they prepare for and preach their sermons! And yes, parents have them during the months of waiting for the birth of their first child . . . or do they? When it comes to the expectations in connection with the birth of your first child there is usually also a mixture of apprehension, fear and joy.

Imagine a couple who has lived their married life childless, desiring the relationship with children, yet having to deal with infertility. Expectations of raising a family dashed to pieces and long gone suddenly become a reality with pregnancy in their old age. How does one understand expectations now? It would be confusing without some kind of explanation, to say the least.

Our text records Elizabeth and Zechariah experiencing expectations fulfilled with the birth of a son in their old age. Apparently this had been an earnest expectation for which they had been praying quite a long time. (cf. Luke 1:13) However, such a strange occurrence did not happen without the LORD first revealing His plan and purpose in this special child whom Elizabeth would birth. According to the angel's "birth announcement" to Zechariah in Luke 1:16-17, his son, John, would *go before Jesus in the spirit and power of Elijah*,

to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared to meet Him.

Zechariah could hardly believe it! (cf. Luke 1:18-20)

This account harkens back to an earlier “birth announcement” of another forerunner of Jesus. After years of infertility at the age of 99 and 89, God appeared to Abraham and Sarah to announce the birth of Isaac through whom He would eventually bring His Messiah, Jesus. Couldn’t God have at least acted at a more “appropriate” time in their life? All Sarah could do was laugh at such a thought. Genesis 18:12-14 says that *Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD?”*

As Zechariah clung to the unbelievable nature of such an event he was struck mute until John’s birth. Elizabeth responded much differently when she became pregnant. According to Luke 1:25, Elizabeth praised God *saying, “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”* Unfortunately in those days many thought being barren indicated God’s disfavor and often brought social reproach. But apparently the Holy Spirit revealed much more about John in relationship to his cousin, Jesus, as expressed during Mary’s visit to her home. At the sound

of Mary's *greeting* John leaped . . . for joy . . . in her womb, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and confessed that the baby in Mary's womb was **her Lord!** (cf. Luke 1:41-45)

One of the most difficult expectations for parents is knowing that they have to let their children go to make a life of their own, in which those same parent will not have the primary roll. From the outset of this "birth announcement" Elizabeth and Zechariah had to recognized the "higher" purpose for this pregnancy. Their "miracle baby" didn't belong to them but to the LORD and His greater purpose of giving witness to Jesus and God's will in his life. The typical "dreams" and expectations of acquiring a daughter-in-law with grandchildren on their knee would not materialize with John. The common expectation of having their son around to take care of them in their aging and dying processes wasn't necessarily a possibility for them from the outset. Certainly it was outside of their expectations for their son to suffer death in his 30's by being beheaded for speaking out against sin! They could simply strive to be faithful to Yahweh while raising **His servant** for a time.

Many times it is our great expectations which get in the way of the very thing for which we strive. For instance, the desire for our children to love us can override raising our children to love Jesus first and foremost. Yet, we desire our children to love the Lord Jesus. The danger with your expectations

is that many times they are not in accord with God's plan and purpose because you expect things to happen your own way and miss God's way. Do you want your children's love to be governed by your expectations or God's expectations? If their love is governed by God's expectations they will discover the true motivation for any kind of love for you or anyone else—Jesus. Your great expectations are tainted by sin. God's great expectations do away with sin by Christ's death and resurrection **for you!** 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 puts it this way: *The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him Who for their sake died and was raised.* Even the naming of John was in accord with God's purpose and will, not the expectation of family or community traditions. (Verses 59-63)

There were greater expectations in John the Baptizer by God than there were by his parents. When Zechariah could speak again *the Holy Spirit* empowered him to praise God and prophesy about the special mission for which his son had been born! Verse 66 of our text says that *all who heard* the words of Zechariah *laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.* As people wondered about the special things he spoke about John, it raised high expectations in them.

During his public ministry of preparing people to meet Jesus by calling them to repent of their sins and be baptized, Luke 3:15 tells us that *the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ*. Their great expectations could be realized only as they trusted in the One Whom John pointed out to them as the Christ, *the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!* (cf. John 1:29) The realization of great expectations before God is found at the foot of the cross of Jesus, the Christ.

This time of year brings great expectations with the celebration of the coming of Jesus into our lives as the baby of Bethlehem. You may expect presents, family to be together and to get along while they are together! You may expect celebrations with “peace on earth, good will toward men.” You may expect people to act differently, be nicer to one another and so forth and so on. When such expectations are dashed when sin shows its ugly face we still look expectantly to the One Who has dealt with all sin, of all time, for eternity—Jesus.

Thus, we come to the LORD in expectation for Him to fulfill His promises in repentance, confessing our sin in humility before Him, including our sin of wanting His fulfillment to happen on our own terms! We come to Him in expectation for Him to fulfill His promises, submitting to His accomplished Will

in Jesus Christ and looking in faith for Him to accomplish His on-going Will in our lives even if it doesn't meet up to our own expectations. Then, like Zechariah, we too can praise God for His work of salvation in our lives! Amen.