**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #2**

**The Beginning of the Good News:**

**The Birth of John the Baptist**

**Luke1:5-25**

### OT Background

### Verses 1-11

### We see an echo of Genesis 17:9 where this old mother conceived Isaac. Elizabeth is like Sarah and Zachariah was old just like Abraham.

### But this part of the narrative goes far and beyond the old narrative of Genesis for it begins the new chapter of the new covenant.

### Now it is the time of fulfillment of the old promise.

### The unusual conception of John though is like that if Isaac, but John is not just an heir of the Promise to Abraham but is also a Prophet.

### Verses 15-17

### John is like a “Nazirite,, filled with the Holy Spirit to bring Israel back to Yahweh the God of Israel, just like Elijah. A Nazirite is like a ascetic and we have pre-Lucan description of his life and cloth in Matthew 11:11).

### John will go “before the Lord” – these are the same words of the Prophet Malachi (3:1:23 and echo 1Sam 1:19). Malachi’s words define the work of the coming of this new Elijah as a reformer. Here in the context of the Gospel of Luke it will be the preparation for the new covenant.

### John is to be “filled with the Holy Spirit”. This brings to Holy Spirit work as a co-worker with Jesus in bringing the New Covenant.

### Verses 18-20

### Zachariah like Abraham asks a question about the coming birth (Gen 15:8), but the Angel reveals his name as Gabriel, a reference to Daniel 9:21.

### Zachariah was told that he will become mute. Neither Abraham nor Mary later on became mute. Being unable to speak may be seen as punishment by some, but it is imposed silence, so the people who were at the service will know that something unusual has happened and that Zachariah may have time to take and understand the shock, for neither he nor his wife were expecting such great news.

### The people knew that something has happened to their priest.

### Question: If you believe in the Calvinistic understanding of “predestination,” do you think that Zachariah and Elizabeth had faith prior to this great news?

### Verses 21-25

### Consider the time frame. There are five months (1:24), six months (1:26), and then three months in (Luke 1:56), plus there are added eight days (Luke 2:21). The final number is 490 days which may be a hidden allusion to the 70 Weeks prophecy in Daniel 2:21. (See R Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p 282)

### Notes on the text of Luke:

**Verse 1:5 –** *In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.*

a. Herod the Great the son of Antipater, named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C, (Josephus the Jewish historian, *The Antiquities* 15:8).

b. The priest is named Zachariah, which means, “Yahweh has remembered.”

c. The division of Abijah was one of the eight divisions of priests who served in Jerusalem (Neh 13:30).

d. His wife Elizabeth was the descendant of Aaron. This means that John, being of this stock, would one day have to go to serve in the Temple of Jerusalem.

e. Elizabeth means “my God is my fortune.”

**Verse 1:6 –** *And they were both upright in the eyes of God, walking in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord were blameless.*

**Verse 1:7 –** *But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

a. This is like Genesis 18:11. In Judaism this means a misfortune and a disgrace (Gen 16:4,11; 29:32, 30-Lev 20:20,21, 1 Sam 1:5:6; 2 Sam 6:33). Here, Elizabeth is like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and the unnamed mother of Samson (see, Gen 16:1. Gen 25:21, Gen 30:1-Juh 13:2). Sarah is the best example for the barrenness of Elizabeth because Elizabeth was beyond age.

**Verse 1:8 –** *Now while he was serving as priest before God during the turn [of] his priestly course,*

**Verse 1:9 –** *According to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense.*

a. In the first part of the sanctuary at the altar of Incense, there is also the golden seven-branched lampstand, the menorah. [Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language):

b. This is not the Holy of Holies, which was separated by a curtain. Only the high priest will enter it once a year (Heb 9:6-7).

c. Zachariah would enter to clean the altar and to offer fresh incense.

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**A menorah (left), and a relief**

**re-constructed from the Arch of Titus in Rome (below)**

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**Verse 1:10 –** *And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.*

This could be the prayer of king Solomon in 2 Chronicles 6:12-42. No prayer was recited during the time of offering sacrifices. Compare this silence with that of the Crucifixion of our Lord. What can we deduce from this comparison?

**The Angel of the Lord**

An angel appears to Manoah (Judges 13:3). From Zachariah the prophet (1:11-14), we know the angel is a person.

**Verse 1:11 –** *And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.*

a. This alter was described in Exodus 30:1-10.

b. The right hand, “*As is your name, O God, So is your praise to the ends of the earth; your right hand is full of righteousness*” (Ps 48:10). The angel is the messenger of the majesty of God

**Verse 1:12 –** *And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.*

**Verse 1:13 –** *But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.*   
a. “Do not be afraid” is a standard OT way of offering peace and assurance (Gen 15:1, Dan 10:12, 19).

“God’s presence and any of his angels don’t give us terror but peace.”

- St. Antony of Egypt

b. We were not told anything about Elizabeth’s prayers.

c. We are not told anything about Zachariah’s own prayer.

d. John is ***Yahanan*** and means “Yahweh has shown favor”

**John as a Nazirite and a prophet**

**Verse 1:14 –** *And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth;*

***15*** *for he will be great the sight of the Lord, and he shall drink no wine or beer, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.* ***16*** *And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God,* ***17*** *and he will go before him 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.*

a. “*Great in the in the sight of the Lord”* is an echo of 1 Samuel 2:21.

b. “*No wine or beer*” is an allusion to Numbers 6:3, “*he shall abstain from wine and beer.*” See also Judges 13:3 where the unnamed mother of Samson was told not to drink, for her child will be a Nazirite. This is a name issued for anyone who has taken a vow, as set apart for the Lord. The mother will be the model for the child.

c. The Greek word for beer is “***sikera***” and is normally translated as “strong drink.” This was never used for wine, but any alcoholic drink and commonly used for barley beer.

d. “*Filled by the Holy Spirit*” the Coptic MSS have “*while still in the womb*” and this is again an echo of the Hebrew “*from birth*” (See Isa 48:8, Ps 22:11 or “*while still in the womb*” as in Judges 13:3-5; 16:17, Isa 44:2).

e. God’s work very often is done for God and does not wait for our faith, nor is it dependent on our faith.

f. Luke presents us with the New Plan of Salvation: unusual birth, manifestations of angels, and new message.

g. John will “*turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God*” is again allusion to Malachi 2:6 as the Messenger of the Angel of Yahweh (Mal 3:1). This is loaded with many proclamations:

1. John will prepare the way for the Messiah.

2. More important is the fact that the Sons of Israel will seek their God in a new way.

3. It is not about turning away from paganism but toward the New Revelation.

**The Spirit and the power of Elijah**

1. Elijah has received a “*double share of the Spirit of Elisha,*” (2 Kings 2:9-10). Elijah was one of the most powerful figures in the OT. He put an end to the worship of Baal. Here John will do the same but it is no longer Baal who was not worshiped in the days of Zachariah, but it was certainly Yahweh. So the power is needed for the new change.

2. Here John will go before the face of Jesus, who is Yahweh here and the Geek word Kyrios, Lord would be the most common work used for the Greek speaking Jews and for Christians who will read the Septuagint.

3. This is what is meant also by turning the heart of the children by wisdom not by a sword, as did Elijah.

**Is Zachariah a model for those who refuse the good news?**

**Verse 1:18 –** *And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."* ***19*** *And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to preach to you this good news.* ***20*** *And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."*

***21*** *And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple.* ***22*** *And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb.*

***23*** *And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.* ***24*** *After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying,* ***25*** *"Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."*

**Gabriel**

Gabriel means *God is my strength*; the Quran and in [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language) جبريل, *Jibrīl* *Jibrāʾīl*, is confused with the Holy Spirit.

In the [Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible), Gabriel is mentioned in both the OT and the NT. In the OT, he appeared to the prophet [Daniel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel), delivering explanations of Daniel's visions ([Daniel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Daniel) 8:15-26, 9:21-27). In the [Gospel of Luke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke), Gabriel appeared to [Zechariah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zechariah_(priest)), and to the [Virgin Mary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_Mary). Gabriel is foretelling the births of [John the Baptist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_the_Baptist) and [Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus), respectively ([Luke 1:11-38](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel#New_Testament)). In the [Book of Daniel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Daniel), he is referred to as "the man Gabriel," while in the Gospel of Luke, Gabriel is referred to as "an angel of the Lord" (Luke 1:11). Gabriel is not called an [archangel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archangel) in the Bible, but is so called in [Intertestamental period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertestamental_period) sources like the [Book of Enoch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Enoch). In the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, the archangels [Michael](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_(archangel)), [Raphael](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_(angel)), and Gabriel are also referred to as the three great archangels.

**Islam**

1. In [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam), Gabriel (*Jibra'il*) is considered one of the four archangels whom God sent with his divine message to various prophets, including [Muhammad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_in_Islam). The 96th chapter of the Quran Sura [Al-Alaq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Alaq), Gabriel is the angel of the revelation to Muhammad.

2. Gabriel in Islam is the holy spirit, this confusion with the Holy Spirit points to a different doctrine of God.

**Latter-Day Saints / Mormons**

Gabriel is believed to have lived a mortal life as the prophet [Noah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah). The two are regarded as the same individual; Noah being his mortal name and Gabriel being his heavenly form of life.

**Preaching the Good News**

1. So Gabriel says to Zachariah, “*I have been sent to you to preach,*” but please note that preach is the Greek verb, ***evangelizesthai***, the verb used for preaching the Gospel of the Good News.
2. Angels appear here, and later to the Shepherds. From now onwards, heaven will be open, and even Jesus himself says that there are “*angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man*” (John 1:51). We meet on the Lord’s Day the day of his Resurrection to be in communion with the Holy Trinity, and in the camp of God where we are surrounded by the holy angles.

**On the Silence of Zachariah**

According to the Mishnah (Tamid 7:2) the priests say the blessing:

“*The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord makes His face shine upon you,*

*And be gracious to you;*

*The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,*

*And give you peace.”* (Numbers 6:24-26).

But now, given what has happened to Zachariah in the Holy of Holies, the priest, now silent, can’t emerge and give the blessing as it is about to be no longer used because the True and the Final blessing is coming.

**Priestly Blessing**

The priestly blessing of the OT still used in some churches. Here is a question: What is lacking in this form of blessing? We must ask this question.

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