

4th EVENT

[Birth of John, the Baptist Circumcision of John the Baptist

- This text forms a hinge in the Infancy Narrative.
 - It has the fulfillment of one prophecy and the declaration of another one.
- The prophecy of the Angel Gabriel is fulfilled despite the human resistance of Zechariah.
- Luke wants us to see that if God's Will is declared, that He will do what He says regardless of human non-cooperation cf. Acts 5:35-39
- Again, Elizabeth shines, as she resists social pressure in naming John.
- Zechariah has the last word in a patriarchal household.
- "They made signs to him" – since he was deaf-mute
- Zechariah, the priest, wrote the first words of the New Testament: "His name is John".
- 'John' means... the grace of God... or God is gracious
- This was a fitting introduction to the Era of Redemption when the Grace of God would be poured out on the Gentiles and they would be co-opted into the People of God: cf. Eph. 2:11-22
- In Luke 1:13 the Angel said the child was to be called John, therefore this was God's Will.
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- The moment Zechariah **obeyed** God's command the chastisement was lifted from him.
 - This will happen also to the Church and the world **TODAY!**
 - All must return to God's Way and God's Will – the **only way** to Life eternal.
 -
- Maria Valtorta and other Mystics say Blessed Virgin Mary was present at these events
 - That she held the Forerunner in her arms before she held the Saviour.

In 1:13 the Angel said "many would rejoice at" John's birth.

In 1:85 we see that this came to pass.

Luke is showing us prophesy and fulfillment before giving another Prophecy!

The Benedictus: Luke 1:67-79

- Zechariah the priest can **NOW** give a message from God – now that he is in God's Will.
- He begins as Jewish prayer begins by BLESSING GOD.

1:68 "God **HAS** VISITED His People" - illustrated by Jesus present in His Mother's womb!

- the Messianic Era has begun.
- God's **VISIT** means an historic intervention into Human Life on earth. Other such interventions:

Cf. Gen 21:1 for the birth of Isaac

Gen 50:24 Joseph's prophecy about the future Exodus

Ex 4:31 The people realize Joseph's prophecy is fulfilled. "God **has** visited.

Ruth 1:6 She heard God had visited her people...

1:69 "God has raised up **A HORN** for salvation". This means A **Power** for Salvation.
Jesus, the power for salvation is **present** at this announcement!

- “in the House of David” This means Zechariah **knows** who Mary’s Son is!
 - all the priests will know – because they kept meticulous records.
 - It was the priests in the Temple who chose Joseph as Mary’s spouse...
Therefore, they know from the start that Jesus is the claimant to the Throne of David.
- ... as the prophets **said**: Luke is emphasizing Prophecy / Fulfilment throughout.

- 1:70 “God promised to save us from our enemies” but people think that **Human Beings** are their enemies! Paul explains in Eph. 6:10-18 that our **true** enemies are the agents of evil in high places – both human and preternatural.
- 1:72 God “remembers His holy Covenant”. cf. Lev 26:42 ; Ps106:45; Ps105:8-9
- Notice** that Zachariah goes back **to Abraham**: Gen 22:7 – not **Mosaic** Law.
- When St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he also went back before Moses’ time to the faith of Abraham: cf. Rom ch. 4
- Luke **also** does this in Acts 3:25 - to emphasize that Gentile believers were NOT obliged to obey the Law of Moses - yet we are the children of Abraham because in Gen 22:18 God promised “**all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, as a reward for your obedience**”.
- Since Luke writes for Gentiles he reminds us of this great promise – that through Jesus – the Horn of Salvation, Saviour of the world – we become spiritual children of Abraham.
- 1:74-75 The freedom to worship God and serve Him in Holiness was always the aspiration of God’s People – both Old Testament and New Testament – for the Church Luke writes to is a persecuted one.
- 1:76-79 Zechariah **turns to his new-born son**, John, and prophesies his future destiny
- this was prophesied by Angel Gabriel in Luke 1:16-17
 - John was destined to prepare the people to meet their Messiah-Saviour which we will observe in Chapter 3.
 - To be prepared for a visitation of God, the emphasis **was** and **is** - in recent messages from Heaven – on the forgiveness of sins - hence John will preach repentance and will baptize
 - Jesus will do the same initially in His Ministry...
 - Since Luke is dealing with Gentiles coming to Christ from a dark, degenerate world, he emphasizes the forgiveness of sins throughout his Gospel.
Luke 3:3; 4:18; 5:20-21, 23-24; 7:48-49; 11:4; 17:4; **23:34** “Father, forgive them...”
- 1:78 Repentance and Forgiveness opens the “bowels of Mercy” (literal translation!) from God which brings healing and restoration to Humanity.
- This transformation will come through Jesus – present in Mary’s womb right now – He **is** THE RISING SUN coming to visit us.
- 1:79 Jesus is THE LIGHT of the world who will draw Humanity out of the darkness of sin, death and hell on all levels of reality... physical, mental, emotional and spiritual: Ps 106:10, 14
- guiding our feet into the Way of Peace: Isaiah 59:8
 - This is the way to Union with God on earth and Beatitude in Heaven: cf. Is 35

1:80

Hidden Life of John the Baptist: John grew up in the Wilderness

- from Dead Sea Scrolls we feel sure he was an Essene and grew up in Qumran
- he is to be the Elijah-figure of prophecy and he lived like Elijah did in the 9th century BC

Compare Jesus and John the Baptist

- They were cousins – 6 months apart.
- John was the Forerunner to Jesus, the Messiah
- John had a human father and mother
- Jesus had God as His Father and Mary as His Mother
 - ∴ He had 2 natures: one human, one divine
 - ∴ He was the Son of God whereas John was the son of Zechariah
- John prepared the people with Water Baptism for Repentance
- Jesus baptizes us with Water and the Holy Spirit and fire!
- Both faced opposition and persecution
- Both were martyred: John for truth... Jesus for Redemption

Similarities:

- Prophetic Roles: both were prophesied before birth fulfilling the Scriptures
 - John fulfilled Malachi regarding the forerunner: Mal 4:5
 - Jesus fulfilled all Scripture regarding the Messiah
- Both preached repentance and urged the people to turn away from sin to come close to God.
- Both criticized Leaders for hypocrisy and corrupt practices
- Both met with opposition and were accused of being under demonic influence
- Both were arrested, imprisoned and ultimately killed but their deaths were different: beheading and crucifixion

Differences

- Nature and Identity:** John was a human prophet preparing The Way ... declared he was NOT the Christ. Jesus was the Son of God and Divine Messiah. He is the Saviour of all the world.
- Mission:** John's role as forerunner was to identify Jesus
Jesus' Mission was to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
- Baptism:** John baptised with water
Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit and Fire
- Humility:** John said "He must increase; I must decrease" Jn 3:30
This highlighted his subordinate role to Jesus
Jesus' Humility is unreachable: Phil 2:1-10
"His state was divine... became man... humbler yet... even to death on a Cross..."

LUKE CHAPTER 2:

6th Event

The Birth of Jesus

This is a world-event – so Luke puts it onto the world stage: OIKOUMENE = whole world
- **Not just the Jewish World – but Roman Empire**

- 1) Caesar Augustus was Emperor from 30BC → 14 AD
- 2) Quirinius was Governor in Syria: 8-6 BC
- 3) The first of a series of censuses took place for taxation purposes in 8-6 BC
Quirinius organized it in Palestine – which the Romans lopped-in with “Syria” because they refused to recognize Israel as a separate state.
- 4) King Herod the Great died in 4 BC
- Jesus was ready to return home to Nazareth as a 3-year old by then... our Calendar is wrong! Cf. Mt 2:19
- 5) **THE STAR** of Matthew’s Gospel is important for dating. Cf. Num 24:17
There was a planetary conjunction in 7 BC – which seems to be the time of Jesus’ birth!

[If you compute the dates, it works out that Jesus was 3 years old in 4BC. He died in 30 AD.
33 when he died? No, you have to add 4 more years.

It seems that he was 37, in the fullness of manhood – just what was required of the paschal lamb: Ex 12:5.
Tradition says that he was 33 because they were unaware of the mistake in the calendar]

- 6) Joseph and Mary set out from Nazareth – means “branch-town” where God’s Holy Branch grew up
= cf Zec 3:8; 6:12
- 7) To the town of David because they were of David’s House, therefore royalty – yet they were poor and lowly. The census was operated in one’s place of origin.
- 8) To Bethlehem = House of Bread – where the “Bread of Life” was to be born: Micah 5:2
- 9) Mary, his betrothed. Luke emphasizes that **Mary was NOT “a wife”** even though vows had been taken.
– this was a celibate marriage.
- 10) **Yet Mary “was with child”**. Luke doesn’t deal with Joseph’s dilemma: Mt ch. 1

He concentrates on Mary while Matthew dealt with the event from Joseph’s perspective.

- this illustrates the difference between the writings of the Jewish Matthew used to the patriarchal system
 - and the Gentile Luke looking at it from the woman’s perspective.
- 11) Mary’s Son is born in poverty, simplicity and hiddenness in spite of all the prophetic preparation and signs in the heavens! He was born like most of those he would redeem; he wanted to identify with them
 - 12) **“Her first-born”**: a first-born son means the inheritor of the family... also the child of privilege whether there are other children or not: Isaiah 9:6
- remember that **Israel itself was “God’s first-born son” among the nations**: Ex 4:22-23; Jer. 31:9
 - 13) The wrapping in swaddling clothes was normal practice to keep the child warm but also to control the limbs
 - they were like a living mummy... safe and secure
 - the simplicity of the birth-scene is contrasted now with the Angelic response. What could be seen on the material level did not reflect either his dignity nor his glory. Heaven alone could reveal the true reality

14) In 1:79 Zechariah had prophesied that “from on high” they would discern the Rising Sun!

15) 2:9-14: The Heavens opened!

The opening of the Heavens in the **Descent of the Word** in the Incarnation was unseen but the appearance of the Word-made-Flesh in his Birth was different, yet only Heaven could explain it.

The heavens will open again for the Baptism of Jesus, and yet again for his Transfiguration
Jesus’ Father was very concerned that Humanity would recognise His Only-Begotten Son.

2:9-10

“The Angel of the Lord appeared to them And the glory of the Lord shone round them”

In the Old Testament the “Angel of the Lord” ^(is) a manifestation of God’s own Presence.

- Here was The Father announcing the Birth of His unique only-begotten Son.

- To whom was the message given?

- | | | |
|--|------|------------|
| ▪ to the religious leadership in the Temple? | No! | |
| ▪ to Mary and Joseph? | No! | |
| ▪ to the Essenes? | No! | |
| ▪ to SHEPHERDS? | Yes! | - but why? |

a) God, the Father, Yahweh, the God of Israel was called THE GREAT SHEPHERD of His people

Cf. Ps 23 Isaiah 40:11 Ezek 34:11-16

- So, the Great Shepherd came to tell the little shepherds this great Good News
- What was significant about the **Bethlehem Shepherds**?

- (1) They tended flocks belonging to the Temple priests!
- (2) They didn’t personally own them: they were poor
- (3) All their lambs were destined for the Altar of Sacrifice.

- (4) It was this flock in Bethlehem which the priests used
- to turn the Temple into a market- place - used to destroy the poor with over-pricing.

- (5) The Shepherds who cared for this flock were not allowed to go to the Temple themselves
- the priests considered them unclean – but their flocks clean!!

- (6) The priests will not only sacrifice the lambs of Bethlehem, but later the Lamb of God also!

- (7) The contrast between those priests and the shepherds is massive... later Jesus will transform little people like the fishermen into the worthy shepherds of the New Era of Redemption.

- (8) God would not have wanted any of these lambs – who were tainted by injustice and abuse...

- It was to these abused men and boys that God, the Father revealed the Birth of His Son!
- The Great Shepherd came to tell the little shepherds that the Lamb of God was born!

2:10

To their fear of the Divine Presence, God responded by putting them at their ease: “Do not be afraid”. Both OT and NT show God’s predilection for the poor: Lev 25:35-36; Is 11:4; 61:1; Ps 113:7; 1 Sam 2:8. Luke will show this throughout the Gospel...

2:10-11

The Announcement of the Birth:

Luke presents the announcement similar to that of a child of the Emperor in Rome:
“Today, in the City of Rome, a child has been born to the divine Caesar!”

By doing this, Luke challenged the Empire to recognise one who was greater than Caesar!
Countless numbers of Christians would give their lives to proclaim this truth.

2:10

God’s message is Good News! “I bring you news of a **great** joy...”

This **great** joy is the fact that the Messiah has come. The Saviour of ALL the world is here.

Since this is a significant World Event, Luke gives it in its political, social and spiritual context.

*“Today, in the town of David (fulfillment of prophecy) a Saviour has been born **TO YOU**; he is **CHRIST (Messiah) the LORD (Kyrios)**”*

(i.e.) your Messiah is both human and divine!! Jesus’ identity is fully revealed here.

Question: Where would you go looking for the most important person on earth?

- In a palace?

Matthew relates that foreign kings thought this would be the case and they were wrong.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says *“my ways are **NOT** your ways. My thoughts (ways) are as different from yours as the Heavens are from the earth”*

2:12

The Angel gave the descriptive sign “wrapped” in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”.
Who would look for Jesus in a no-place place?!!

2:15

“Go to Bethlehem”. Forevermore, the poor, the lowly, the spiritually needy would ‘go to Bethlehem’ to the House of Bread to be saved...

Notice:

a) **In His Birth:** - wrapped in swaddling clothes
- laid in a manger
- no room for Him in the Inn

b) **In His Death:** - wrapped in linen cloths
- laid in a rock-tomb where no other had lain

Cf. Ps113:7: *“He raises the poor from the dust to put them sitting with princes”*

Luke 1:52: *“He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly”*

- 300 years later God will have pulled down the mighty Roman Empire
and raised up the lowly Church

2:16

“So, they hurried away...” It would TAKE a divine intervention to get those Shepherds to abandon their sheep to investigate anything – because it could cost them their jobs – even their lives!

2:16

The shepherds **found** A FAMILY! Jesus is hidden in the tabernacle of the family... still!

2:17

“When they saw the child...” they evangelized Mary and Joseph!!

2:18-19

Mary listened... treasured their words in her heart.

God Himself, Yahweh, confirmed the mystery for Mary and Joseph

2:20

“The Shepherds went away glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard...”