



BIBLE STUDY

Advent, 2016

John the Baptist The Birth of John

OVERVIEW

John the Baptist is the great character of Advent. He came before Jesus to prepare the way. He preached repentance, baptized in the Jordan River, and was arrested and murdered for his faithful work. According to Jesus, John was the greatest of the prophets (see Matthew 11:11), but John says, "He [Jesus] must increase, and I must decrease," (John 3:30).

In fact, the church has most often painted and pictured John in the Jordan River pointing to Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

In this study we consider the **promise of John** in the Old Testament, and the **birth of John**.

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Introduction: The Lord, in His wisdom, sent one who would go before Jesus, a forerunner, a voice crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord." He was the last and greatest of the prophets, the one who announced the coming of the kingdom of God, and who stood in the Jordan River with a hand dripping with baptismal water, pointing the world to its only hope: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This is John the Baptist: fearless, rough, living on locusts and honey in the wilderness, railing against sinners and washing away their sin. He preached repentance and hope. He preached his cousin, Jesus Christ.

In this four-part Bible Study we consider this saint, our brother John the Baptist.

Opening Psalm: 85:1-7

¹ Lord, you were favorable | to your land;*
you restored the fortunes of | Jacob.

² **You forgave the iniquity of your | people;*
you covered | all their sin.**

³ You withdrew | all your wrath;*
you turned from your hot | anger.

⁴ **Restore us again, O God of our sal- | vation,*
and put away your indignation | toward us!**

⁵ Will you be angry with us for- | ever?*" Will you prolong your anger to all gene- | rations?

⁶ **Will you not revive | us again,*
that your people may re- | joice in you?**

⁷ Show us your steadfast | love, O Lord,*
and grant us your sal- | vation.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

The Promise of John the Baptist

The person and work of John the Baptist were promised by the prophets.

Read Isaiah 40:1-5 and Matthew 3:3.

According to Matthew, who is the "voice crying in the wilderness"? According to Isaiah, what was the work of John the Baptist? What will happen when the "rough places are made

smooth" (Isaiah 40:4)?

Read Malachi 3:1 and Matthew 11:10.

According to Jesus in Matthew 11:10, who is the "messenger" Malachi promises?

According to Malachi, what will John the Baptist do, what is his work?

Read Malachi 4:5-6. These very last verses of the Old Testament will be quoted by the angel in Luke 1. What specific work will John the Baptist do?

The Birth of John

Read Luke 1:5-14, Zacharias and Elizabeth.

How does Luke describe the family of John? Can you imagine Zacharias and his work in the temple? Notice the reaction of Zacharias to the angel in v. 12-13. Can you remember similar reactions from other people in the Scriptures?

Consider the joy of Elizabeth and Zacharias after their long wait for a child (see v. 13-14)? This is something almost all parents can relate to.

We often think of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus as the bad guys with bad theology, but Zacharias and Elizabeth are presented to us as pious believers who were waiting for the coming Messiah. What are a

few indications of their faith in the text?

Read Luke 1:14-25, the Conversation with Gabriel.

According to Gabriel, what will be the result of John's birth (see 1:14)?

I count eight things that Gabriel promises John will do in 1:15-17. Can you find these eight works?

Zachariah doubts the angels promise, so he asks for a sign. What sign does Gabriel give?

In Luke 1:26-38 we hear of the angel appearing to Mary, announcing that she would have a Child without a father.

Read Luke 1:39-56, The Visit of Mary

Mary travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth, and a number of astonishing things occur. What miracles do you notice in the story?

Notice 1:41-45. How does Elizabeth speak of Mary's child? What does she call Him?

Mary's Song in 1:46-55 is called the *Magnificat*, and is full of teaching and theology. In this overview, what themes do you notice in Mary's song?

If you have time, consider reading Hannah's Song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. What similarities do you notice?

Read Luke 1:57-66, The Birth and Naming of John

What miracles occur in this text?

Read Luke 1:67-80, The Song of Zacharias

The hymn of Zacharias is called the Benedictus, and is the normal canticle (Biblical Song) for the morning service called Matins.

This song has two stanzas. This is important to note. This first part of the hymn has to do with Jesus and the hope of Israel. The second stanza has to do with John the Baptist,

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and his work of preparing the way for the Lord.

Can you identify the themes of the first stanza (1:68-75)? The second (1:76-79)?

This hymn is absolutely full of the Lord's mercy and kindness. According to Zachariah, what has the Lord done for us...
...according to 1:68-69?
...according to 1:70-72?
...according to 1:73-75?

What gracious work will the Lord accomplish through John the Baptist, according to 1:76-79?

With all the activity around the birth of John the Baptist, there are great expectations for his work. We will see in the next studies if those expectations were met.



Closing Hymn: Comfort, Comfort Ye My People (TLH 61)
by Johann Olearius, 1635-1711, tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1829-1878

1. Comfort, comfort, ye My people,
Speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
Comfort those who sit in darkness,
Mourning 'neath their sorrows' load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem
Of the peace that waits for them;
Tell her that her sins I cover
And her warfare now is over.

Art: *John the Baptist with child Jesus*, painting by Bartolomé Esteban Perez Murillo, 1670

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