

**LOOKING AHEAD**

As Luke continues the story John's birth as the forerunner of the Christ, the focus rightly turns to Jesus. He who was to come would deliver His people from all that bound and persecuted them. Set free in new spiritual life, they will live in obedience to God's Word, in holiness and righteousness, the gifts of grace in Christ to all who put their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Let's look at Luke 1:76-80.

1- **GIVE LIGHT.** Zechariah's prophesying turns from God's Son to his own son John: *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."* This bursts with Old Testament allusions.

God is truly doing remarkable things, right before the eyes and ears of these humble people, as His promises come true. The angel had said John would go before Messiah *"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"* (an echo of Malachi 3:1). As the gospel narrative unfolds, the rest of Zechariah's words will come true, as John ministers a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, pointing people to the Lamb of God (John 1:29, Matthew 11). For He, Christ Jesus, is the One of whom the prophets spoke, the sun of righteousness (Malachi 4), the light of the nations (Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah 42), the light of the world (John 8:12), the prince who brings peace (Isaiah 9:6).

2- **STRONG IN SPIRIT.** Luke closes his narrative about John's birth and Zechariah's prophecy with one robust statement in Luke 1:80 *"And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel."* Of course in due time, John's life carries on in Luke's narrative, in chapter 3:1-22, which summarizes John's ministry in preparing the way of the Lord, to make ready for Him a people prepared (see also Luke 1:15-17, 7:18-35. John's ministry is also recorded in Matthew 3:1-12, 11:1-19, 14:1-12, Mark 1:1-11, 6:14-29, John 1:19-37, 3:22-36).

Recall that the angel said John would *"not drink wine or strong drink, and would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb"* (Luke 1:15). This sounds like the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-3), except there is no record that John did not cut his hair, nor is there any affirmation that he was actually a Nazirite. But many theologians point to him as the last and greatest prophet of the Old Covenant.

3- **THE HOLY SPIRIT.** John certainly did live in the wilderness, eating locusts and honey, being clothed in a garment of camel's hair. The emphasis of Luke 1:15 is that he would not be controlled by addictive substances, neither wine nor strong drink, such that he would be self-controlled as the servant of the Lord (Eph 5:18). Moreover, John would be filled with the Holy Spirit, from the womb. He is a remarkable person, marked out by God before he was born for a special assignment. He was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, filled with the Holy Spirit, to prepare the way for the Christ, the Pre-eminent One.

Jesus said of him, *"truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."* But his message and mission was to glorify Christ, and point people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. So Jesus says, *"yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."* So the message we take away from John is Jesus Christ, just as God planned. Only Jesus saves!

4- **PREPARE THE WAY.** Advent is a time of anticipation of the arrival of Christ, the promised Deliverer. God is gracious and announces the good news, and gives you time to repent and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such was the ministry of John the Baptist, which was foretold also in Isaiah 40:1-5, *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

5- **RESPOND IN FAITH.** The first hearers of these words were the exiles in Babylon, as God encouraged their faith in His promises to bring them back to the Promised Land, which He did. Their sins had led to their sufferings, but God is gracious and His covenant love is everlasting. God makes the rough places smooth as He brings His people to redemption, and redemption to His people!

John the Baptist was the final messenger of these promises, as he pointed the people to Jesus, even as he pointed out Jesus to the people. God was at work, as John was filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking God's words and doing God's deeds, to also point us to Jesus Christ. Do you hear the Lord's voice today, whether you are near or far in the wilderness, seemingly away from God and His grace? Hear the words of grace, and come in repentance and faith to receive God's forgiveness in Jesus. Then live for Him, His new life through you, by the power of the Holy Spirit within, as God fulfills His promises in you! □