

5) There was in the days of Herod, king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6) And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7) But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. 8) So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, 9) according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10) And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. 11) Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12) And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon Him. 13) But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14) And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15) For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16) And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17) He will also 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 a people prepared for the Lord." 18) And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." 19) And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. 20) But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." 21) And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. 22) But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

INTRO: This evening we welcome our third miracle baby. The first two were recorded in the Old Testament. Tonight's baby- John - is right at the beginning of the New Testament. It seems that God sends a miracle baby to usher in a new era in Biblical history: Isaac at the beginning of Israel; Samuel as Israel transitions to a nation ruled by kings. So let's begin this time by setting the scene in the history of the world, and the history of Israel in particular.

## I. SETTING THE SCENE FOR THE ARRIVAL OF BABY JOHN

### A. In the days of Herod the king (v.5)

1. an Edomite (Esau) actually; builder (Bob) of harbor; temple
2. serves at the pleasure of Caesar (hence, Caesarea Maritum)

B. Priesthood re-established after Babylonian return

1. tribe of Levi; descendants of Aaron specifically
2. located throughout land of 12 tribes (Ephraim/Menasseh)
3. by lot, moved to Jerusalem for a month
4. by lot, assigned specific duty: sacrifice, incense 3 PM prayers
5. cp. LCMS synod delegate (Pastor Weber)
6. Zechariah and Elizabeth advanced in years; she's barren
7. once-in-a-lifetime temple duty; angel tells him of a son

II. THIS MIRACLE BABY WAS LONG FORETOLD (unlike Isaac, Sam)

A. By ancient prophets

1. Isaiah 40: Comfort...prepare the way...mountains...voice... (obscure?)
2. cp. Luke 3:4;-6 ...as written in Isaiah the prophet, prepare...(and more)
3. Malachi 3:1 Behold I send my messenger...
4. cp. Matthew 11:10 (Jesus!) This is he...Behold I send My messenger...
5. this baby's going to be really special (Jesus: none greater)

B. And an angel (Gabriel), with some last minute prophecies

1. Abraham re: Isaac per God; Hannah per re: Samuel per Eli the priest
2. no wine or strong drink = Nazarite lifestyle
3. filled w/Holy Spirit from mother's womb (Lk.1:41 ...leaped for joy)
4. "turn the hearts of many" is a definition of 'repent', John's theme

III. WE HAVE A SIGN WITHIN A SIGN

A. Baby leaping in mother's womb

1. as prophesied by Angel Gabriel
2. John is special, and so is Mary's baby
3. Holy Spirit inspired them to speak, report

B. Father Zacharias mute for 9 months (a sign of authenticity of Gabriel)

1. v.18 how shall I know... (you're talking to an angel, Zach!)
2. v.20 mute...**because** you did not believe....
3. how about v.13? Your prayer is heard **and** your wife will conceive...
4. what was Zacharias praying about while on duty?
5. so, people can pray; God tells answer; people still doubt? Hmmm

#### IV. SO, HOW DID THIS MIRACLE BABY TURN OUT

A. Grew, became strong in spirit, in desert until manifestation (v.80)

1. camel's hair; locusts and wild honey (lived off the land)
2. hermit lifestyle; aged parents; Spirit-moved

B. Boldly preached repentance; moved hearts

1. tax collectors, soldiers: what shall we do?
2. Scribes and Pharisees: brood of vipers
3. One mightier than I coming after me (3:16)
4. baptized (anointed) Jesus for **His** work (cp. Samuel/David)
5. famously said, "Behold, the Lamb of God...sins of the world"
6. miracle baby Jesus lived holy life; fulfilled all, blameless
7. Himself the priest and sacrifice
8. Jesus redeemed Isaac and Samuel and John and you and me

CONCLUSION: Like Jesus, John was only in his early 30's when Herod had him executed. When informed of John's death, Jesus said, "There has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." (John 11:11) But Jesus adds, "But he who is least in the **kingdom of heaven** is greater than he." Got that? You who confess Jesus as Lord and Savior are greater miracle babies than John the Baptist. Amen.