

**A COMMITTED CHRISTIAN,, A BELIEVER,, CANNOT DUCK THIER RESPONSIBILITY.**

**MANY OF YOU,, MIGHT KNOW,, THAT I AM A FORMER POLICE OFFICER,, AND AS SUCH,, I HAD MANY RESPONSIBILITIES AND AS A BELIEVER IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,, I STILL HAVE,, LIKE YOU DO,, MANY RESPONSIBILITIES,, THAT WE CANNOT DUCK!**

***A YOUNG POLICE OFFICER WAS TAKING HIS FINAL EXAM FOR THE POLICE ACADEMY AND HE WAS GIVEN THE FOLLOWING PROBLEM TO SOLVE.***

***“YOU’RE ON PATROL IN THE CITY,, WHEN YOU HEAR AN EXPLOSION,, IN A GAS MAIN,, ON A NEARBY STREET. ON INVESTIGATION,, YOU DISCOVER A LARGE HOLE IN THE STREET. YOU SEE AN OVERTURNED VEHICLE NEARBY. INSIDE THE VEHICLE,, THERE’S A STRONG SMELL OF ALCOHOL,, AND BOTH OCCUPANTS A MAN AND A WOMAN,, ARE INJURED. TO MAKE MATTERS EVEN WORSE,, YOU RECOGNIZE THE WOMAN AS THE WIFE OF YOUR CHIEF OF POLICE,, WHO’S OUT OF TOWN ON POLICE BUSINESS.***

***A PASSING DRIVER STOPS TO OFFER YOU ASSISTANCE AND YOU REALIZE THAT HE’S A MAN,, WANTED FOR ARMED ROBBERY.***

***SUDDENLY,, A MAN RUNS OUT OF A HOUSE,, SHOUTING THAT HIS WIFE IS EXPECTING A BABY,, AND THE EXPLOSION HAS CAUSED THE BIRTH TO HAPPEN.***

***ANOTHER MAN IS YELLING FOR HELP,, BECAUSE THE EXPLOSION,, PROPELLED HIM INTO A FLOODED CANAL AND HE CAN’T SWIM”.***

**DESCRIBE IN A FEW WORDS,, WHAT ACTIONS YOU’D TAKE!**

**THE YOUNG MAN THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT,, PICKED UP HIS PENCIL AND WROTE: *“I’D TAKE OFF MY UNIFORM AND MINGLE WITH THE CROWD!”***

**BUT,, JUST AS A POLICEMAN CAN’T DUCK HIS RESPONSIBILITIES,, NEITHER CAN A COMMITTED CHRISTIAN!**

AS CHRISTIANS,,, BELIEVERS IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,,, WE'RE OFTEN CALLED TO;

**"SWIM AGAINST PUBLIC OPINION"**.

***JESUS CERTAINLY DID AND SO DID THE SUBJECT OF OUR BIBLE READING TODAY.***

WHO DO YOU THINK WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT? BUT BEFORE YOU ANSWER,,, I HAVE A TIME-HONORED STORY,,, ABOUT A SPECIAL BIRTH,,, THAT MIGHT HELP YOU,,, TO IDENTIFY HIM.

HERE ARE SOME CLUES! FOR JUST A MOMENT,,, PICTURE THESE EVENTS IN YOUR MIND. IN THIS STORY;

(\*) ***THERE'S A HEAVENLY MESSENGER***,,,

(\*) ***A MIRACULOUS BIRTH***,,,

(\*) ***A NORMAL CHILDHOOD***,,,

(\*) ***A VERY SHORT MINISTRY***,,, AND,,,

(\*) ***THEN THERE WAS THE UNTIMELY DEATH***,,, ***AT THE HANDS OF THE AUTHORITIES, HE HAD OFFENDED.***

NOW MANY PEOPLE MIGHT BE ABLE TO FILL IN THE DETAILS,,, IF THEY WERE ASKED TO,,, AND THEY'D TRY HARD TO GUESS CORRECTLY,,, BUT,,, I THINK THEY'D BE WRONG!

I'M PRETTY SURE THAT THEY'D TALK ABOUT SHEPHERDS,,, WISE MEN,,, HEAVENLY CHOIRS,,, STABLES FILLED WITH ANIMALS,,, OR A GUIDING STAR IN THE SKY.

BUT NONE OF THESE WERE PART OF THIS STORY! YOU SEE,,, THE REASON THAT MANY WOULD PICK THE STORY OF THE SHEPHERDS AND SO ON,,, IS THAT THAT STORY,,, CLOSELY MIRRORS,,, ANOTHER STORY. BROTHERS AND SISTERS,,, OUR STORY DIDN'T START WITH AN ANGEL APPEARING TO MARY! NO,,, OURS STARTED ABOUT 6 MONTHS EARLIER AND ABOUT 70 MILES AWAY.

BEFORE THE ANGEL APPEARED TO MARY AND JOSEPH,,, HE HAD ALREADY APPEARED TO A MAN NAMED ZECHARIAH.

TO ANNOUNCE THE BIRTH OF A CHILD,,, WHO WOULD BE NAMED JOHN.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE STORY OF JESUS' OLDER COUSIN JOHN. WE'RE GOING TO DO THIS,,, BECAUSE THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS,,, WOULD NEVER BE COMPLETE,,, WITHOUT THE BIRTH OF JOHN.

NOW,,, I HELD OFF,,, LETTING YOU TELL ME,,, WHO THIS PERSON IS,,, SO,,, GO AHEAD,,, TELL ME,,, CAN YOU GUESS WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT?

YEP,,, THIS WEEKEND,,, WE CELEBRATE;  
**THE NATIVITY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.**

ALL FOUR GOSPELS,,, TELL US THINGS ABOUT THE LIFE OF JOHN. SO,,, JOHN THE BAPTIST,,, WAS AN IMPORTANT FIGURE FOR THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST,,, IS AN AMAZING STORY,,, **OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD!**

BUT IN ORDER FOR US TO UNDERSTAND IT,,, WE HAVE TO GO BACK TO A TIME IN HISTORY,,, BEFORE TODAY'S GOSPEL READING,,, IN ORDER TO GAIN IT'S WHOLE SIGNIFICANCE.

ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH WERE AN ELDERLY COUPLE. NOW,,, WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW OLD THEY WERE,,, HOWEVER; SCRIPTURE SAYS THAT ZECHARIAH SAID:

*“I AM AN OLD MAN,,, AND MY WIFE,,, WELL ADVANCED IN YEARS!”*

THEY WERE A RIGHTEOUS COUPLE,,, WHO NEVER WERE ABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN.

ZECHARIAH WAS A PRIEST IN THE TEMPLE,,, DURING THE REIGN OF KING HEROD OF JUDEA.

ELIZABETH,,, WAS A DESCENDANT OF AARON,,, THE HIGH PRIEST,,, IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. MAKING ELIZABETH,,, A RELATIVE OF MARY,,, JESUS' MOTHER. *NOW ZECHARIAH HAD BEEN CHOSEN TO OFFER INCENSE AT THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS AND THIS WAS AN HONOR,,, THAT ONLY CAME ONCE IN A PRIESTS LIFETIME.*

WHILE ZECHARIAH WAS AT HIS DUTIES,,, THE ANGEL GABRIEL APPEARED TO HIM AND HE WAS AFRAID! GABRIEL SAID: *“DO NOT BE AFRAID ZECHARIAH,,, YOUR PRAYERS HAVE BEEN HEARD. YOUR WIFE WILL BEAR A SON,,, AND YOU WILL NAME HIM JOHN. HE WILL BE GREAT IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD AND HE WILL BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM BIRTH”*. ZECHARIAH SAID; *“HOW CAN I BE SURE OF THIS? I’M AN OLD MAN AND MY WIFE,,, SHE’S NOT YOUNG EITHER”*.

THEN GABRIEL SAID; *“I STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND I HAVE BEEN SENT TO SPEAK TO YOU AND TO TELL YOU THE GOOD NEWS. NOW YOU WILL BE SILENT AND UNABLE TO SPEAK,,, UNTIL THIS DAY HAPPENS,,, BECAUSE YOU DID NOT BELIEVE MY WORDS”*.

ZECHARIAH *COULD NO LONGER HEAR,,, BECAUSE HE DIDN’T LISTEN* AND *HE COULDN’T SPEAK,,, BECAUSE HE SPOKE BACK,,, INSTEAD OF RECEIVING,,, BY FAITH,,, WHAT GABRIEL HAD SAID*.

WITH *GOD’S BLESSING,,, ZECHARIAH & ELIZABETH’S SON WAS BORN* AND ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM OF THAT DAY,,, WHEN THE TIME CAME FOR THE NAMING OF THE CHILD,,, ELIZABETH SHOCKED EVERYONE. SHE SAID HIS NAME WAS TO BE JOHN,,, INSTEAD OF NAMING HIM AFTER HIS FATHER.

IN THE CULTURE OF THE ISRAELITES,,, THIS WASN’T DONE. THE NAME OF A BOY CHILD,,, WAS VERY SIGNIFICANT!

WHEN THE ANGEL GABRIEL TOLD ZECHARIAH THAT HE AND HIS WIFE WOULD HAVE A CHILD,,, EVEN AT THEIR ADVANCED AGES,,, THE FIRST THING THAT HE TOLD THEM,,, WAS THAT THEY WOULD NAME THIS CHILD JOHN!

IT WASN’T UNTIL THE EVENTS IN OUR GOSPEL READING AND AT THE TIME OF JOHN’S CIRCUMCISION,,, THAT THIS DIVINE INSTRUCTION,,, CAUSED ANY DIFFICULTY.

SUDDENLY,,, THE NAMING OF JOHN,,, BECAME A VERY EMOTIONAL ISSUE,,, WITH ELIZABETH STANDING HER GROUND AGAINST A BUNCH OF RELATIVES WHO WERE INSISTING THAT THIS BOY BE NAMED AFTER HIS FATHER.

AGAINST THE CROWDS INSISTANCE,,, AND AT THE EXACT MOMENT,,, THAT ZECHARIAH WROTE DOWN JOHN'S NAME ON A TABLET,,, ZECHARIAH REGAINED HIS HEARING AND SPEECH. A MIRACLE HAPPENED!

**THE NAME JOHN MEANS; THE GRACE OF GOD!**

THE MOMENT THAT ZECHARIAH OBEYED WHAT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD HAD SAID,,, AND WROTE DOWN THAT NAME,,, HE RECEIVED GRACE AND HE BEGAN TO PROPHECY. FIRST,,, ABOUT THE COMING MESSIAH THEN,,, ABOUT HIS OWN SON,,, JOHN.

THEN THE PEOPLE WHO GATHERED AROUND HIM,,, WERE FILLED WITH FEAR SAYING;  
***“WHAT WILL THIS CHILD BE? FOR SURELY,,, THE HAND OF THE LORD,,, WAS WITH HIM”!***

THE PEOPLE WERE SO ASTOUNDED,,, TO HEAR ZECHARIAH SPEAK,,, THAT THEY KNEW THAT JOHN WAS NO ORDINARY CHILD.

***NO,,, JOHN WASN'T GOING TO BE AN ORDINARY MAN!  
JOHN WAS TO BEAR WITNESS,,, TO THE COMING OF;  
THE MESSIAH,,, CHRIST JESUS!***

ZECHARIAH KNEW,,, BY THE HOLY SPIRIT,,, THAT JOHN WAS TO LEAVE HIS FAMILY,,,  
***TO GO OUT INTO THE DESERT,,, TO PREPARE HIMSELF,,,  
TO MAKE STRAIGHT,,, THE WAY FOR THE LORD JESUS.***

JOHN WAS TO GO BEFORE JESUS,,, TO BE THE FORERUNNER,,, TO MAKE THE HEARTS AND SOULS OF THE PEOPLE,,, READY FOR THE MESSAGE OF JESUS.

JOHN GAVE THE PEOPLE THE KNOWLEDGE OF SALVATION THROUGH REPENTENCE AND BAPTISM,,, FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

**HE PROCLAIMED THE ONE,,  
*WHO WOULD VISIT HUMANITY,, FROM HEAVEN AND  
WHO WAS TO BE CALLED THE LAMB OF GOD AND THE  
SON OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.***

*JOHN WAS THE VOICE,, CALLING OUT IN THE  
WILDERNESS,, PROCLAIMING THAT IT WAS JESUS,,  
WHO WAS TO APPEAR TO US,, WHOSE SANDALS,, HE  
WAS UNWORTHY TO CARRY.*

**ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY TOLD CLEARLY,, THE  
MISSIONS OF JOHN AND JESUS.**

***JOHN MADE THE PATH STRAIGHT FOR JESUS,, AND  
JESUS,, CAME TO BRING LIGHT TO ALL WHO ARE  
LIVING IN DARKNESS,, OR,, WHO ARE LIVING WITHOUT  
THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S LOVE AND ALSO,, FOR  
THOSE WHO WERE LIVING IN SPIRITUAL DEATH,, TO  
BRING THEM,, NEW LIFE.***

**INSTEAD OF LIVING THE COMFORTABLE LIFE OF A  
PRIEST,, LIKE SO MANY,, WHOSE FATHERS WERE  
PRIESTS BEFORE THEM,, JOHN CHOSE TO LIVE IN  
THE DESERT,, CLOTHING HIMSELF WITH A CAMELS  
HAIR ROBE AND EATING HONEY SOAKED INSECTS.**

**WHILE IN THE DESERT,, JOHN GREW STRONGER IN  
THE SPIRIT AND HE PREPARED HIMSELF FOR THE  
DAY,, WHEN GOD,, WOULD SEND HIM OUT,, TO  
PREPARE ISRAEL,, FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE LONG  
AWAITED MESSIAH.**

**WHILE IN PRISON,, JOHN WAS BEHEADED BECAUSE  
OF HIS PROPHETIC MINISTRY OF REPENTENCE.**

**IT'S NOT UNCOMMON,, FOR US TO THINK OF JOHN  
THE BAPTIST,, AS A GREAT MAN OF GOD. THE  
GREATEST AND THE LAST OF THE PROPHETS OF THE  
OLD TESTAMENT,, AND THAT HE WAS!**

**EVEN JESUS SPOKE OF JOHN IN THE GOSPEL OF  
MATTHEW SAYING;**

***“TRULY I SAY UNTO YOU,, AMONG THOSE BORN OF  
WOMEN,, THERE IS NONE GREATER THAN JOHN THE  
BAPTIST.”***

**BUT DON'T LEAVE HERE TODAY WITH JUST THAT  
THOUGHT,, BECAUSE;**

**(\*) *IF YOU'VE RECEIVED THE GRACE AND  
FORGIVENESS OF CHRIST JESUS,, INTO YOUR  
HEARTS,, BY FAITH,,***

**(\*) *IF YOU'VE CONFESSED,, WITH YOUR MOUTH,,  
THAT JESUS IS LORD OF YOUR LIFE,, AND,,***

**(\*) *IF YOU BELIEVE IN YOUR HEARTS,, THAT GOD  
RAISED JESUS,, FROM THE DEAD,,***

**THEN,, **YOU BELONG TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD!****

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS,, *WE BELIEVERS,, ARE ONE  
WITH JESUS,, FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT,, AND  
PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE.* BECAUSE WE  
ARE CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS,, WE CANNOT DUCK OUR  
RESPONSIBILITIES.**

**WE MUST SHARE THE LOVE,, THE GRACE AND THE  
MERCY OF JESUS,, WITH EVERYONE WE KNOW,,  
WHenever WE CAN,, ALWAYS REMEMBERING TO  
KEEP JOHN THE BAPTIST,, AS AN EXAMPLE,, FOR US  
TO LIVE BY.**

***THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE  
HOLY SPIRIT***

**+++ AMEN+++**

**( 1,681) WDS,, 7 PGS**