



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 1:57-80**

To understand how the birth of John happened.

## The Names We Don't Know

On July 29, 1866, Thomas Obadiah Chisholm was born in a log cabin near Franklin, Kentucky. When he was 27 years old, he was led to the Lord by an evangelist named Henry Clay Morrison during a revival, and approximately 10 years later in 1903 at the age of 37, he was ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church. It wasn't until 20 years after that, in 1923, that Chisholm penned the hymn *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*: "Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me." Struck by the beauty of Lamentations 3:22-23, where the reader discovers the awe-inspiring truth that God's mercies are new every morning, Chisholm reminded the church that even in the midst of calamity (like the book of Lamentations' context) we can find the beauty of God's mercy every day.

Mercy is a characteristic of God, and one that we find in Luke 1:57-80. Elizabeth, an older woman who had never been able to conceive and give birth, finally delivers her long-expected and miraculously announced baby, and the community around her responds: "And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her" (Lk. 1:58). The people, knowing Elizabeth's inability to give birth, viewed her newly born baby as an act of mercy from God, and rejoiced. This also fulfilled what the angel Gabriel spoke to Zechariah in Luke 1:14: "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth." And yet, even after rejoicing with her, they immediately begin to question her choice for the baby's name.

## A Baby Is Born

After John is born, he is circumcised on the 8th day and given his name. Below are some key details.

### **EIGHT DAYS**

For the first eight days of his life, John is actually without a name. Verses 59-60, “And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” Withholding the name of the child until circumcision was not a common practice; historically the child was always named at birth (Gen. 21:1-3; 25:24-26). Jewish history records this practice developing as early as the 3rd century, but not during this time.

### **JOHN**

The primary concern was not the timeframe, however, but the name chosen. For one reason or another, the family assumed the boy would be named after Zechariah, but again, this was not a customary practice. Usually, when a boy was named he would take his grandfather’s name. Regardless, Elizabeth declines and insists on the name John, a name shared with no one in her family (Lk. 1:61). The crowd shifts their attention to Zechariah in order that he might weigh in, but recall that he was mute after his encounter with Gabriel (Lk. 1:20), and Luke implies that he was also deaf too: “And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called” (Lk. 1:62). Perhaps it was out of reverence for Zechariah to not speak to him since he himself could not speak, or perhaps he was as mute as well as deaf. The text doesn’t say one way or the other.

Zechariah’s answer, however, is curious: “His name is John” (Lk. 1:63). Rather than giving a more customary answer like Elizabeth gave, (“He shall be called John”) his answer indicates that the matter had already been decided prior to this point, which is actually true. Gabriel told them in Luke 1:13: “But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.” Though Zechariah was at first unwilling to trust (and thus he was unable to speak and apparently hear), he has now apparently come to terms with what Gabriel told him. Upon his affirmation of Gabriel’s announcement, he is restored: “And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God” (Lk. 1:64). All of these events led the community around these new parents to wonder what kind of man John would grow up to be (Lk. 1:66).

## Zechariah

In addition to be able to speak and hear, a more important event occurred to Zechariah as well: “And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” (Lk. 1:67). This is now the third individual who receives the Holy Spirit. Initially John received the Spirit in the womb (Lk. 1:15), then Elizabeth upon feeling John leap when John heard the voice of Mary (Lk. 1:41), and now Zechariah upon affirming the name that Gabriel told them to name their baby. It is interesting that this entire family receives the Holy Spirit first. Mary, the mother of Jesus will have the Holy Spirit “come upon her” (Lk. 1:35) but that is in reference to the immaculate conception, not the filling of the Holy Spirit. However, Mary does eventually receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. She is among those listed in the upper room when the Holy Spirit comes, and verse 4 says “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4).

Zechariah, now filled with the Spirit, begins to prophesy concerning both Jesus and his son John. Below are some key details and phrases.

**A HORN OF SALVATION**

The horn imagery is common in the Old Testament as an allusion to “power” and “might.” Psalm 18:2, for example, says, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

**HOUSE OF DAVID**

This horn will come from “the house of David” (Lk 1:69). The Davidic covenant is conveyed to David by the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:16: “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” This is a covenant that Jesus fulfills as an heir to the Davidic throne (Matt. 1:6).

**ABRAHAM AND THE COVENANT**

Zechariah also connects the coming birth of the Jesus to the Abrahamic covenant. This is significant for two reasons. One, it draws on the Abraham/Isaac story. As Abraham was willing to give his only son and not withhold him, now God will do the same. Secondly, Jesus connects His Passover meal to this when he pours out the cup and says, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Lk. 22:20). Jesus, then, establishes a new covenant that is continuous with the old, albeit with some differing covenantal demands.

**PREPARE THE WAY**

Zechariah turns his attention to his son in verse 76 and connects John to two Old Testament passages. The first one is Isaiah 40:3: “A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” The second one is Malachi 3:1: “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.” Both of these references depict one preparing the way for God to come to His people, thus these are implications to the deity of Christ.

**THE SUNRISE AND LIGHT**

In verse 78b, Zechariah says, “Whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high.” This is likely an allusion to Numbers 24:17: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob.” Verse 79 speaks about the light that will come to those in darkness, and is likely an allusion to Isaiah 9:2: “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.”

Zechariah’s prophecy is an interweaving account of John and Jesus. John will come to prepare the way for the One who will bring fulfillment to messianic prophecy and bring the presence of God back to the midst of His people, to forgive sin, and to bring peace.

## What About Now?

The importance of this passage and much of chapter 1 for that matter is seeing how much more biblically complex the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus really is. When you begin to understand that all of the events even leading up to His birth are predicted in the Old Testament, and that even John’s role is predicted as well, you start to realize how monumental all of it really is. An important application, then, would be to continue to know and understand the Old Testament. So much significance is drawn from the Old Testament in every New Testament book. It’s hard to rightly read and understand the New Testament without some working knowledge of the Old.

# Study Questions

## Day One

1. Read Luke 1:57-60. How did Elizabeth’s neighbors and family interpret her pregnancy and delivery of her son? What did they do with her? What did everyone assume she would name her son? What did Elizabeth decide to name him instead?

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2. Read Luke 1:61-66. What was everyone’s response to her name choice? Why did they “make signs” at Zechariah? What does that imply? What was Zechariah’s response? What is significant about the way he responded? What does this reflect? (Hint: See above notes)

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## Day Two

1. Read Luke 1:67-69. What happened to Zechariah? What did he begin to do? What does the first part of this prophecy mean? What is the significance of the “horn of salvation?” (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 1:70-71. In your own words, what do these two verses mean?

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## Day Three

1. Read Luke 1:72-75. What holy covenant is likely referenced here? What are the two ways the mentioning of Abraham is significant? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 1:76-77. Who does Zechariah begin to speak to in verse 76? What two Old Testament verses is he likely alluding to here? (Hint: See above notes)

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## Day Four

1. Read Luke 1:78-79. What Old Testament verses are likely being alluded to here? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 1:80. What happened to their child? What did he do? Where did he stay and until when?

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## Week 5 Discussion: Decide Obedience Now

When Zechariah was motioned by the people around him to write down what the name of his and Elizabeth's son would be, his response was definitively present, not future: "His name *is* John." That's because, in Zechariah's mind, it already was his name; the angel Gabriel told him so (Lk. 1:13). When Gabriel first appeared to Zechariah, Zechariah did not believe and was disciplined for it (Lk. 1:20); now Zechariah believes and is obedient. He had made a decision for obedience such that when asked, it was already decided: "His name *IS* John." Talk as a group about the importance of deciding to be obedient before obedience is required of you.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever been disobedient, and then immediately wondered how you let it happen?
2. How important is it for you to prepare for obedience before obedience is required? Why?
3. How does having an accountability partner help in preparing for obedience?
4. Have you ever been disciplined for being disobedient? Did that create in you a deeper commitment to obedience? How so?
5. How does present obedience strengthen future obedience?
6. How can the church be a place that both encourages preparation for obedience while also maintaining grace in light of confessed sin?

## Takeaways:

1. Elizabeth gives birth, and she and Zechariah recognize that his name is John in spite of their community's opinion.
2. Zechariah receives the Holy Spirit, and prophesies about John and Jesus, making several Old Testament allusions.