

Second Wednesday Advent
December 9, 2009
Luke 1:8-17

John the Baptist is here announced by God through His angel to John's father as an answer to prayers of this husband and wife – Zechariah and Elizabeth. They had waited so long. In fact, one wonders if they were even waiting any more. Elizabeth had not been able to conceive. Now, they were up there in years. They had most likely accepted the fact that they were not going to have a child. Or, so they thought. God surely does often work in mysterious ways. Here God, through this angel – we don't know if it was Gabriel or some other angel – Word does not tell us the unneeded detail, lets Zechariah know that Elizabeth is going to conceive. She is going to have a baby, a baby boy, in fact. This would, of course, have been wonderful enough, but the angel went on to tell Zechariah about his future son's life's work. That was even more exciting.

John the Baptist was going to Prepare the
Way for the Savior.

Yes, his son John would be a joy and delight to his father and to his mother too, of course. But John would, in fact, be a joy and delight to many people, the angel said. Why? That's where it gets really interesting.

For God Himself would be equipping John. John would be great in the sight of the Lord. Maybe the world would not consider John great. He never was rich. He was not great in business or great in government or great in any particular way of interest to the world. But God would count him great.

Very unusual for Jewish culture, John, as a so called Nazarite, was never to drink any wine or other alcoholic beverage. In fact, he never ate a grape, a raisin or drank even grape juice. That was actually a hardship. Today, we in the United States are so used to being able to go to a tap and drink water there from, that it is hard for us to imagine that it is not so, even today, in many places. It certainly was not true then. Their immune systems, because of their situation, were a good deal tougher than ours, but, even at that, they almost never drank water straight but only water mixed with wine to discourage, at least somewhat, some of the bacteria and other creatures in the water.

John was to be a Nazarite, a very special one at that, a life long one. A Nazarite made a special promise to God and, for a time, would set himself or herself apart for special service to the LORD. Usually it was just for a limited time. In John's case, as in the case of Samson and Samuel, it was life long. God made that choice.

Furthermore, God would grant John a strong influence of the Holy Spirit. It's no mystery how that happens. The Spirit works with and through God's Word. John's parents, you can be sure, taught their son God's Word from little on, as did Samuel's parents, Samson's parents and even Moses' parents.

And when he came of age, John would, by his work in the Word, bring many of the people of Israel back to the Lord their God. And as a forerunner of the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, he would turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and he would turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous.

1. Let's briefly consider each of these things. The first thing is that he would do his work just ahead of the work of the LORD God Himself. One of the things John did all of the time was point people to the One coming right after him. That One is here clearly identified as the Lord God and it's Jesus. John himself was the fulfillment of a prediction of the Prophet Malachi. There in Malachi the LORD – I Am that I Am – said he would send His servant ahead of Himself to prepare the way.

John was that servant. God sent John through John's extraordinary birth from old Zechariah and Elizabeth. And that undoubtedly explains why God waited so long to give John to Zechariah and his wife. God certainly did something similar with Abraham and Sarah. Both boys (Isaac and John) were children of promise. God was at work through them. And in both cases, though separated by almost 2000 years, it had to do with the coming of the One who would bring blessing to all the peoples and nations of the world, undoing the curse of sin and death promoted by the devil.

2. John would turn many people of Israel back to the Lord their God. That word 'turn' is the exact meaning of the word 'convert.'

Isn't it sad that people of Israel needed to be converted! So many of the earlier prophets worked at the same thing. The people ignored and then inevitably forgot God's Word. Instead they followed the baals and asherahs. Finally, the hardship of the Babylonian Captivity got them permanently over that. But more time went by and the heresies of the Sadducees and Pharisees took over, liberal heresy or conservative heresy. The Sadducees were very modern. They basically denied the Bible is God's Word. So, of course, anything that did not agree with the terribly limited human intellect, further degraded by sinfulness, they just tossed out. So, they didn't believe much of anything about God or His Word.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, firmly believed the Bible is God's Word, but also placed human religious thoughts above what God actually said. They didn't understand the Gospel at all. They were persuaded that the commandments save through their obedience. Only by a severe limitation on the commandments were they able to convince themselves that they had kept them. Both the denial of God's Scriptures on the part of the Sadducees and the Pharisees denial of the Gospel had mislead many people into unbelief.

John would preach both Law and Gospel so that God could turn many hearts back to a firm trust in God's Word and the Savior God.

So, John's preaching and baptizing gave to a largely lost new generation a return to the faithful hearts of such forefathers as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Disobedience to God's

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Word was replaced with the godly wisdom of righteousness put into action. As people held again to the reliability of God's Word and rejoined in God's gift of forgiveness, to be earned by the Savior/God Himself, they were indeed a people prepared and made ready for the coming of that Savior.

Trust the Word of God! Cling to all of God's Gospel promises in Christ especially forgiveness, life and salvation. Then, like John, you tell people what God teaches so that He, by His Word, can keep making more people ready for the day when our Lord and Savior Jesus will come again to usher all of His people into His Father's heavenly mansions forever. Amen.