

BIBLE READING DAY 2, MONDAY: FEBRUARY 28

The Birth of John and Jesus

Luke 1:57–80; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1-20; Luke 2:21–39

Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were calling him Zechariah, after his father. But his mother said, “No, he is to be called John.”

“None of your kin is called by that name,” they said. And they made signs to his father, asking what he wanted him to be called; and he beckoned for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all marveled, and immediately Zechariah’ mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.

And great wonder and fear came on all who lived round about them, and all these things were talked about throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard it took it to heart, saying, “What, indeed, will this child be?” And the hand of the Lord was with him.

And Zechariah, his father, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High. For you will go before the Lord to prepare the way, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high will visit us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit and lived in the wilderness until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened in this way. After his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and yet unwilling to make her a public example, planned to divorce her privately.

But while he was considering the matter, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Now all this took place to fulfill the word of the Lord through the prophet,

***Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Emmanuel—which means “God with us.”***

And Joseph rose from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took to him his wife, but was not intimate with her until she had borne a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Now it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken of all the world. This was the first census, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own city. And because he was of the house and lineage of David, Joseph went up from Galilee and the city of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, to be registered with

Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child. And it came to pass that, while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo! an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were much afraid. And the angel said to them, "Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will."

When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

"A woman's heart should be so hidden in God that a man has to seek Him just to find her."

Max Lucado

They came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the things which had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at the things the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

At the end of eight days, the child was circumcised and given the name Jesus, which he was called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time was fulfilled for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord,

Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is commanded in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

In Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. And he came, led by the Spirit, into the temple. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and praised God, saying, "Now, O Lord, you will let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to shine upon the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

Jesus's father and mother marveled at the things said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce your soul, too!) that the thoughts and intentions of many hearts may be revealed."

There was also a prophetess named Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having lived with a husband seven years from her maidenhood, and as a widow until she was eighty-four. She was continually in the temple, worshipping with fastings and prayers night and day. She came up at that moment, gave thanks to God, and spoke of the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Approximate Timeline of Jesus's Public Ministry

BEFORE BAPTISM	BAPTISM	FIRST PASSOVER	SUMMER	FIRST BOOTHS	WINTER	SECOND PASSOVER	SUMMER	FIRST BOOTHS	WINTER	SECOND PASSOVER	SUMMER	THIRD BOOTHS	WINTER	FINAL PASSOVER
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DEVOTIONAL DAY 2 (MONDAY FEBRUARY 28)

Good things come in small packages

Based on Luke 1:57–80; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–20; Luke 2:21–39

“If I had known how fun grandkids were,” say umpteen number of grandparents, “I would have had them first!”

Well, nothing like playing the part of Zechariah that makes me want to do a character study on the father of John the Baptizer! And I can just imagine how elated he was to have a child after all of those years (no comment about how un-elated Elizabeth might have been about having a child at her age!).

But something about age and realizing what is really important in life makes me think that Zechariah was a great dad. After all, he and Elizabeth raised a child whom Jesus Christ said, “*there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptizer.*”

This past Christmas someone posted on Facebook the question, “What is your least favorite Christmas song?” and “Mary Did You Know?” made someone’s least liked list! Of course Mary knew (Michael the angel and getting with child without ever “knowing a man” was of course some of her first clues!)

And yet, did they really know just how important John and Jesus would grow up to be? Did the shepherds really understand just who that was in the manger? Did Simeon understand that his eyes were seeing the hands who would give sight to the blind? God had promised him he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah and now there he was in his arms. Even though Anna was a prophetess, she surely could not fully comprehend that the eight-day old Christ child would be the redemption for whom the 84-year-old widow had been waiting.

Could Mary and Joseph and Zechariah and Elizabeth even imagine in their wildest dreams that we would be here, more than 2,000 years later, still talking about those precious little boys.

But walk down to the nursery sometime and please volunteer to serve there, and when you do, ask yourself, “Do you know who and what these little children are going to grow up to be?”

What a pleasure it is to watch kids grow up in our church! Little Elizabeth Harlow came running up to me the other night at full speed, and I gathered her up in my arms, loving on her but missing my own little precious daughters who have now all grown up.

One last thought: Some children will indeed be a sword that will pierce our souls. How can we not do all that we can do to help make sure these children grow up to be saved and equipped for bringing the love of God for generations to come.

“We have been chosen by God to be the bow in our children’s lives to point them as arrows in His direction.”

Crystal McDowell on Psalm 127:4

Good things can be found in little packages indeed and they are all bundled up down the hall in our nursery, in the children’s and youth wings of our church, and in our children and grand-children, our nieces and nephews, in Good News Clubs at our schools and in our ministries like Compassion International. Virtually everywhere we look, we can see priceless presents in little packages for the future.

Father in Heaven. Thank you that we can call you Father. Help us to be ever mindful of the precious cargo we hold in our hands, in our hearts, and in the halls of our churches and schools. Open our eyes to see the light in them that Simeon and Anna saw in Jesus. Amen.

--By Tim McKeown

WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS IN RESPONSE TO WHAT YOU HAVE READ:

WHAT DID GOD SAY TO ME?

PRAYER: WHAT DID I SAY TO GOD?

ACTS OF PRAYER: ADORATION, CONFESSION, THANKSGIVING, SUPPLICATION (How God Can Supply Needs

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