

20:20 Vision Ministries—Devotions by Roger Browning Week 49 (December 2-8, 2018)

December is a time of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. I will spend this entire month going through the very familiar account of the birth of our Lord and Savior. I hope you enjoy reading about the Reason for the season!

Sunday, December 2 (Luke 1:5-7)

But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were well along in years. (Luke 1:7)

As we begin our study, we meet a priest named Zechariah whose name means “Jehovah has remembered.” He and his wife, Elizabeth, are both descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses (v. 5). To the best of their human ability, they walk in obedience to the law; therefore, they “[are] upright **in the sight of God**” (v. 6, emphasis mine). That is the best position any of us can achieve! All of us are sinners (Romans 3:23). This leads to eternal death (Romans 6:23a). Our only hope is to receive the “**Gift of God**” (Romans 6:23b) through our Lord Jesus Christ. When we do this, we, too, are declared righteous “**in the sight of God**.” Everything in this passage is positive until we arrive at v. 7, “**but** they had no children.” We will continue the story tomorrow.

Monday, December 3 (Luke 1:7-13)

And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1:10)

No matter how great our personal credentials are, sooner or later, we will arrive at our “but.” Zechariah and Elizabeth have no children, a disgrace in the society in which they live (v. 7). By lot (actually by God’s sovereign will), Zechariah is chosen to burn incense in the temple while the other assembled worshipers are praying outside (v. 8-10). How I hope that all the assembled worshipers in our modern society are praying outside the church service in their homes on a regular basis. If so, we will soon experience revival! An angel appears to Zechariah and uses one of the 365 “do not be afraid” declarations in the Bible (v. 12-13). He tells him, “Your **prayer** has been heard.” Maybe you, like Zechariah, pray many requests, but there is **one prayer** that is foremost on your mind. Can you trust God with it today?

Tuesday, December 4 (Luke 1:11-15)

He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth. (Luke 1:14)

As we continue in verse 13 from yesterday’s devotion, we see the promise of a child to this old couple. They are to name him John, a name that means, “Jehovah has shown grace.” What a marvelous example this is of God’s wonderful grace! A couple that has given up on their lifelong dream of having a child receives one as a gift from their prayer-answering God! This child will be a delight to them (an under-statement) and “will be **great in the sight of the Lord**” (v. 15a). Once again, I remind you that this is the best we can ever achieve. We can never be great because we are all sinners, but we can be declared **great in His sight!** The proper translation of v. 15b is “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit **from his mother’s womb**” (see footnote in NIV). Is there a better reason to be prolific?

Wednesday, December 5 (Luke 1:16-17)

Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. (Luke 1:16)

Our study today picks up where the Old Testament leaves off. God has been silent for more than 400 years since Malachi predicted the coming of one like Elijah to prepare the way for the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5). John the Baptist fulfills this prophecy by the clothes he wears as well as in the way he preaches. His message of repentance offers listeners an escape from the dreadful judgment that will take place at the end of the Great Tribulation (the Day of the Lord). Salvation accompanied by repentance is characterized by a great revival of family life (v. 17) as Malachi prophesied (Malachi 4:6). Is there anything more needed in our country than this? Can **fathers** lead the way?

Thursday, December 6 (Luke 1:18-20)

Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” (Luke 1:18)

Can you blame Zechariah for wanting confirmation? He and Elizabeth are too old to have a child. He does not understand that **every** child is a **gift of God** given by the **grace of God**. I love the way this plays out. Zechariah uses the following declaration to justify his question: “I am . . . and my wife is . . .” (v.18). The angel’s emphatic reply is (v. 19), “**I am Gabriel.**” We often try, based solely on our own understanding, to figure out how an event can take place. Wouldn’t it be great just to trust God and take Him at His Word? Gabriel silences Zechariah’s mouth because he does not believe his message. I wish that every preacher who does not believe God’s miracles would be silenced until he/she can say with confidence, “God said it! I believe it! That settles it!” There would be pastoral openings all over the country.

Friday, December 7 (Luke 1:21-25; 39-45)

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:41)

God fulfills His promise, and Elizabeth praises Him for replacing her **disgrace** with His **grace** (v. 23-25). The next 12 verses tell the story of Gabriel appearing to Mary to announce the entry of God’s Son into the world. We will look at these verses next week. Mary goes immediately to the home of Elizabeth, perhaps to be her midwife (v. 39-40). I closed Tuesday’s devotion with a bold statement declaring the proper translation of v. 15 to be, “from his mother’s womb.” I know this because, **from the womb**, John recognizes Jesus who is only a few days old within Mary. Only the power of the Holy Spirit could give him this knowledge three months prior to his birth (v. 41,44). Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit as well (v. 41), allowing her to honor Mary above herself (v. 42-43). She blesses Mary for trusting what God said to her (v. 45). I pray that you are learning to claim His promises as well!

Saturday, December 8 (Luke 1:57-66)

They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” (Luke 1:61)

Elizabeth gives birth to her son, and her neighbors and relatives share her joy, acknowledging that God’s mercy has accomplished this miracle (v. 57-58). She takes him to be circumcised on the eighth day in obedience to the law (v. 59-60) and declares his name to be John (Jehovah has shown grace). The leaders object because there is no one in her family with that name (v. 61). I pray that none of you can say, “there is no one in my family who understands that **Jehovah has shown grace.**” They give Zechariah a writing tablet so that **he** can name the child. He shocks them all by writing, “**His name is John.**” The Lord opens his mouth and loosens his tongue allowing him to praise God (v. 63-64). I pray He will do the same for you!