

Preparing The Way

Luke 1:57-80

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

This past Sunday morning — which also was Christmas Eve — Pastor Don took us to the birth of John the Baptist. We already know from our previous studies who John was and that his mother, Elizabeth, was the cousin of Jesus' mother, Mary. But Pastor Don emphasized to us how this passage demonstrates the power of honoring, praising, and sharing the Lord.

First, Pastor Don outlined how the coming birth of John the Baptist was miraculous — not in the same way that Jesus' birth was miraculous, but still it has God's fingerprints all over it as well. As we know, Elizabeth was barren and far too advanced in years — well past child-bearing years — to conceive. Yet, she still became pregnant ... the Lord protected her physically throughout her pregnancy and birth of her son ... God gave her the strength to care for a new child at her age ... and undergirding it all was the Old Testament prophecy of Christ's forerunner who would prepare the way for Him ... and of course how all of that impacted wondrous observers.

Pastor Don also shared about the obedience of Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah — particularly in the face of family and community pressures. They were expected to name their child after his dad, but both Elizabeth and Zechariah stood their ground and obeyed God, naming their miracle son John. It's never easy to remain steadfast in the face of people's pressure — but they did it! What's more, Zechariah's speech was restored as soon as he concurred with Elizabeth about his son's name, and that miracle happened in front of everybody at John's circumcision. Imagine the otherworldly wonder.

The cool thing is that the elderly couple didn't have to do much ... just obey God. And the Lord carried out the miracle, which focused attention back on the power of God. Folks were thinking about and pondering the works and plans of the Lord ... all because Elizabeth and Zechariah said yes to God. It's the same principle for us: When we honor God, other people will notice.

But the miraculous moments weren't over. The first words out of Zechariah's mouth, Pastor Don reminded us, were praises and prophecies about his son John the Baptist. (vv. 68-79). Obviously the entire region was soon talking about Elizabeth and Zechariah and this infant they named John. But more than that, they were wondering about what the Lord was up to. Pastor Don asked us if people are noticing anything different about you and me — not in the sense that we're proving ourselves "better" than others, and others want to be as "good" as we are and live the lives we have. Rather, are we being obedient to the Lord, especially when it's hard to and the pressure's on?

Because even when we think that no one is noticing or watching — they are! And our behavior honoring God will — in big ways, in small ways — help "pave the way" for others to come to know the Lord and get closer to him. Indeed, we're in many ways forerunners for Jesus, too!

Pastor Don also encouraged us that often our honoring of the Lord in the presence of others will naturally lead to them asking us why we do what we do or say what we say. That's super exciting, because those are opportunities for us to share the gospel with those who don't yet believe! And how much more of an open door is it when OTHERS are wondering what makes us tick? That's all part of the big adventure of the Christian life that Pastor Scott often has talked about in his messages.

Of course, not all of us are natural "talkers" or feel comfortable speaking about God to others. But here's the cool thing: The Lord doesn't require that of us. In fact, HE wants the credit and the attention! Sharing the gospel is all about Jesus, and zero about us. We don't point at ourselves ... we point others toward the Lord. Have you ever found yourself in a discussion with another person or a group of people and asked God to give you the words to say that would open things up in regard to sharing the gospel? If not, isn't that one prayer that God would love to answer affirmatively?

If you're unsure where to start in your evangelism efforts, that's OK. Pastor Don and Pastor Scott would love nothing more than for you to come to them for tips on how to start ... and they'll pray with you, too. As will other believers here at GraceWay.

But you have to be willing to take that first step in faith.