



30/12/25 Morning Service

With Ben Midgley & George Kawalek

**John the Baptist
Luke 1:5-25**

This is a wonderful chapter of scripture. There is so much we could go into but we can only touch on a few things. As we heard from Morgan last week these events leading up to the birth of Christ are not just for Christmas because this book goes on through Jesus' life, his ministry, his final work on the cross, his resurrection and beyond into the book of Acts where Luke continues to write to the early Church about the powerful work of the

Holy Spirit amongst the apostles and disciples, establishing the church and how Paul, an opponent of the gospel, became a Christian preaching the gospel to the Gentiles until he finishes up in Rome on trial for his faith. It is not just a story. It changes people's lives and gets us involved in what God is doing. The book is like briefing notes dedicated to Theophilus who may have been the lawyer who reportedly was representing Paul at his trial in Rome so that a proper judgement, not only about Paul but about Jesus, God and the gospel could be reached not only by the courts but eventually by us too. It asks us, 'Where do we stand?'

The first people to take the witness-stand is an elderly couple in verses 5-7, Mr and Mrs Levi, of exemplary godliness. Regarding the law and the commandments, they are blameless. They were truly righteous, in perfect and right relationship with God. That is not the same as being sinless. They had taken responsibility for their sin. As they served in the temple they acknowledged that they fall short of God's perfect standards. We can not walk properly and rightly with God when there is something wrong with our heart. We need God's grace. They were humble, broken and realistic about themselves and dependent on God walking in fellowship with God through the experiences of life. We can be reassured of the character of these well-educated people who knew the teachings of the scriptures, the temple and the sacrifices. They have been trusting God for many years serving God faithfully. This couple could not have children. They are reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah, the originators of the Jewish people. Here is a man like Abraham and a woman like Sarah: exemplary Israelites but they still remain barren. From the beginning God said, "Go forth and multiply". Families were the greatest blessing mankind could have. They felt deeply ashamed that they had no offspring in spite of years of praying for a child. They had been serving the Lord faithfully for so many years and yet there was no such blessing for them. Others, faithful or indifferent were enjoying their families. So many people walk away from God because they have not received from him everything they wanted. Paul writes, "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1Tim 6:6) This couple had learned the secret of true godly contentment. They were not in a transactional relationship with God, 'If I do this, God, then you will do that'. They knew that serving God is not about what you can get from him. It's about the privilege of gazing into his face, of knowing him and walking with him. God is good and worthy of praise whether he gives or not, works in you or not. He is God and he is worthy of praise. Like Van Gogh who kept painting all his life even though he never sold a picture, this couple persevered even though nothing was happening because God is true and God is good. What if Jesus wasn't prepared to suffer the cross, or Paul the persecutions and death? If you are going to be godly, you have to take up your cross and follow him. We have to accept there may be a degree of discomfort, anguish and pain, frustration and difficulty in the walk of faith. This is a very realistic faith. It will equip you to walk through all manner of hard providences and difficulties and still shine with joy. Can you find contentment when everything is going wrong? The secret of their faithfulness is in v8-13. God had in fact been listening to their prayers all along. All through the difficulties God has been paying careful, loving attention to their lives, needs, concerns, fears and worries. They didn't go on a long pilgrimage or fast, it was just in the usual course of their daily lives on a day when he was going about his business that what God has been planning all along, comes to fruition at just the right time. Zechariah was taken off guard. He was terrified. Answers to your prayers may take time but keep rolling your cares onto him. Stay in fellowship with him. Remind yourself that God loves you. He has given his one and only Son for the remission of your sins so you can enjoy God

now and forever. If God did nothing else good for the rest of your days, is it enough? Is Jesus enough? Does he hear our prayers? Has he met our deepest need? Are you satisfied with Jesus Christ? Are you at peace with God? Here in this secret place in the temple surrounded by incense, sacrifices and the prayers of the people outside Zechariah walks out dumb struck by this unlooked-for message of reassurance. God sees us, God knows us. He is working out his plan in and through our lives. We are not forgotten, we are not overlooked, we are deeply cared for and God is in control.

Zechariah is not the only one who has been praying. All the people in the courts of the priests, the courts of the men, the courts of the women and the courts of the Gentiles and beyond those courts and around the world people cry out and groan for God. They want to know God; who are we, why are we here, how can we know God and have fellowship with him? The angel told Zechariah that his prayers have been answered but not just his but the prayers of tens of thousands, millions of people around the world. He has heard all the prayers of all the world through out history. And he has given the answer to our deepest need. The answer is Jesus Christ. It all begins with this miraculous birth. A child will be born. But this child is not 'that child'. This miraculous birth is a prelude to an even more amazing birth.

John sounds like an ordinary name. So many people in the Bible are called John. John means 'the gracious gift of God'. Our God is the God who gives. We are the thankful people who receive his gracious gift. God is good, kind and always hears us. He answers our deepest longings in his own perfect way and time. "...but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." (Rom 8:26) God knows what we need. We need his Son. It is good news but not to those who are happy in their sin and hard towards God and indifferent to his grace because salvation comes through repentance and faith. Apart from faith the world remains under his wrath and judgement. That is not good news to those who are determined to oppose the truth. It is good for those who are broken in spirit and conscious of their sin. They understand that God's law is perfect and we have broken it. Heaven is the perfect place. Who can stand there in their own righteousness? John will be a sober preacher in the spirit of Elijah. This pointed expression was spoken by Malachi (3:1 & 4:5) that one would come in the spirit of Elijah to make the way straight. Elijah turned a nation back to God. Fire came down Heaven. There were miracles, signs and wonders. He rescued people from their drunken stupor and sobered them up to confront the reality of the living God. For four hundred years since that prophecy the Holy Spirit had been absent. It had been a long hard, dry road. There was just patient faith. Zechariah got to hear. "He's coming". John is coming and he will be full of the Holy Spirit from the womb. He was granted the gift of believing. It is the gift of the Spirit. It is something God does. God gives; we receive. If you have faith, you were marked out before you were even made. Praise him who has given you these good things!

Christianity is often criticised for its plethora of words in our Bible, books, prayers. Songs and sermons (18-25) 'mere chattering Christians' (see C.S. Lewis's book *Mere Christianity*) Zechariah learns that the promise 'the word made flesh' is being brought to pass. The word comes and suddenly he can't speak. By verse 24 against all reasonable thought Elizabeth is pregnant. In the beginning 'God said ... and then it came to pass' 'God spoke ... and then it happened' God promised his Son would come and he has come. How ever long this day of grace lasts with this speaking and praying singing and reading our Bibles let's never forget that the day is coming when the things that are spoken will happen. Please don't take God's slowness to act as an unwillingness to act or as impotence to act. When God says a thing it will happen. God made the world by his word. He said Christ will come again. He will. It is crucial that we act, that we believe and start to live in the light because these things will come to pass. Judgement day will come and every eye will see him and every knee will bow and every tongue, unwillingly or otherwise, will confess that Jesus Christ was, is and ever shall be Lord of all.

The witness of these two godly people demands the verdict that God indeed is truly powerful, truly faithful and truly worthy of our faith until we see the things that we have spoken of come to pass.