

A BABY! AT MY AGE?!**Luke 1**

Intro: A number of years ago, when I was already old enough for grandchildren and, in fact, I was looking forward to that more than thinking about having more little ones of my own, Kathy and I had a scare of sorts. We thought, just maybe, she might be pregnant. Until we determined it was a false alarm, I had an entire range of emotions running through my head. It's not that I didn't want another child, raising our daughters had been, to that point, and continued to be, a wonderful joy and privilege. It's just that, if we were going to become parents again I had to revamp my thinking in a drastic way. I had to think of finances. I had to think of child care. I had to think of the fact that I might have to attend his/her high school graduation by hobbling into the event with a walker. I just thought I was too old to have a baby!

Elizabeth and Zechariah had wanted children their entire lives. It was what every good Jewish couple wanted. They, unselfishly, wanted a legacy along with the joys of parenthood. They also most likely, and very practically, wanted someone who could care for them in their old age. G. Campbell Morgan and other scholars have suggested that, as godly people who were pining for a word from God after centuries of silence and also waiting expectantly for the promised Messiah, they hoped they would be the couple who would give birth to that promised deliverer. That hope had apparently faded with age and now *Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.* Luke 1:7b.

So imagine what it was like for them, when, believing the promise from the Angel Gabriel, they discovered that Elizabeth, who was supposed to be too old, is pregnant! Exuberance! Fear! Joy! Wonder! A BABY?! AT MY AGE?! And because they took God at his word, the answer is, **YOU BET!**

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Prior to this good news, for Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, of whom we heard last week from Jeffrey, the reality was . . .

You can do everything right, and your heart still breaks

- This was the case for Elizabeth. Listen, *In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.* Luke 1:5-7 (ESV)
- There's so much here in these few short verses! This is high praise for this elderly couple. To be recorded in the Bible as righteous before God and walking blamelessly in the law of the Lord, is no small feat. It broadcasts loudly yet simply that Elizabeth and her husband are very good and very godly people. They did the right things and they followed the right rules. Zechariah was a priest who faithfully did his duty in the temple as required. Elizabeth came from generation upon generation descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses, who was the original high priest. Now, just because the priesthood was in the family heritage is no reason for Elizabeth to be a godly person. After all, I know PKs (pastor's kids) who resent their lineage so much they do all they can prove they can be as naughty as worst of them. This wasn't Elizabeth. She was a good person who reflected God's holiness.
- Like most women, and certainly like the average Jewish woman, she wanted children for the reasons I already stated, and also because it's simply the instinct of a good person to have babies and to raise children. But no matter how much she wanted it, our text says she was barren. Elizabeth had so wanted a child, she had prayed for a child, and finally, she had given up praying for that child. And now she and Zachariah had arrived in their senior years childless.
- Despite that disappointment, they remained faithful. Even though they'd done everything right, their hearts were still broken. But . . .

God does everything right, and he brings us along for the ride

- A favorite saying is one that I got from our former Bishop, John Zuck, "*Isn't it just like God to give us the desires of our heart?!*" And that is what God did for Elizabeth and Zechariah. G Campbell Morgan writes: "These people - Zecharias and Elizabeth, two ordinary people; and yet their very names suggest hope, aspiration, and faith." The name Zechariah literally means "God remembers." And Elizabeth literally means, "The oath of God".

- God keeps his promises. He remembers. He keeps his oath. Remember in Malachi how, frequently, a promise in the prophecy would end with the promise that in various ways, proclaimed, “God said it, and he will do it!” God is good with his word. He promised a Messiah, and it would come to pass. And the one who would prepare the way for that Messiah, would be the child of this heretofore childless couple.
- You heard last week about how the angel came to Zechariah and informed him that he and his previously barren wife would become parents. Zechariah was speechless. I mean, he first of all doubted, for a little bit, and then he was unable to speak for 9 months. And then he went home and he communicated with his wife the happy news and they joyfully did what produces babies (in younger people usually) and our text says, *After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”* Luke 1:24-25.
- Obviously Elizabeth had felt reproach at her childlessness. Maybe she was self-conscious about the pitying glances of people who had passels of children. And now with this news, she could have proclaimed like Toby Keith, “Whattaya think of me now?!!!!” But instead, true to her holy nature, Elizabeth’s response is sweetly understated. “Look what God has done for me! A Baby! At my age!” Isn’t it just like God when he gives us the desires of our heart?
- But what should we expect? He does everything right and he brings us along for the ride. In Elizabeth’s case that was a joy ride. She sequestered herself for a while and when her young cousin, named Mary, who had gotten similar news of an even more impossible pregnancy came calling, it became a song of joy when, to use the picturesque language of G. Campbell Morgan, . . .

A daughter of the Old Testament gets to sing the first song of the New Testament

- Listen to our text, *In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”* Luke 1:39-45
- She could have been a grumpy old bitty and resented Mary for upstaging her. But we’ve already established that Elizabeth, though she was old, had no grumpiness or bitterness in her. She knew the joy of the Lord and she was in tune with the Holy Spirit as she sang out, *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!* This young cousin was carrying in her belly the Lord! And her own baby in her own belly knew it too! He leapt for joy in Elizabeth’s womb! It called for a song and she sang it.
- How much more can an old lady take?! Well, as it turns out when that old lady is the faithful daughter of the God of the universe, she can take and also give, a lot! Elizabeth, was a bridge from the Old into the New Testament as she sang her song of joy. Morgan puts it this way, *“Elizabeth, the daughter of the Old Testament, was the first singer of the New Testament. Hers was the first song of the gospel; the first song of the new age that was breaking.”*
- And then Elizabeth welcomed her own son, and . . .

His name is "God is Gracious"

- Listen to the text, *Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that 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 would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.* Luke 1:57-66

- His name will be John! I don't care if he doesn't have any uncles or heroes named John, his name will be John! Why? Because John means God is gracious! And God has been gracious to us! And he is gracious to all of humanity.
- I once thought, "A BABY?! At my age?!!!! Now, I proclaim with my husband His name will be John!!!! And people talked about it everywhere, but Elizabeth and her husband just smiled at the goodness of God.
- This obedient couple became parents because it was God's plan. He uses regular people like Zechariah and Elizabeth and like you and like me to bring about that plan. G. Campbell Morgan says this:

"All the history of the Bible is the history of the extraordinary touching the ordinary, of the supernatural acting upon and beyond the natural. The extraordinary is ordinary to God. The supernatural is natural with God. It's a wonderful, wonderful story, the merging of the ordinary and the extraordinary, of the natural and the supernatural; God never defeated, but marching on toward the goal upon which his heart is set."

Conclusion: Thank you God for your wonderful plan that is not limited by human understanding. Thank you that your heart is set on a goal that brings salvation to everyone who calls on your name. Thank you that because of the One John prepared the way for, even in tough times, A WEARY WORLD REJOICES. Amen.