

# John the Baptist

## Birth of a Prophet-Priest

### John's Heritage

- Both of John's parents, Zacharias ("Jehovah remembers") and Elisabeth ("the oath of God"), are from the tribe of Levi and descendants of Aaron – Luke 1:5
- Zacharias is specifically of the course of Abia/Abijah – Luke 1:5, I Chronicles 24:10
- Their home was in the hill country of Judah – Luke 1:39
- Tradition says they lived in the Levitical city of Hebron, though there are other possibilities – Joshua 21:11-16, I Chronicles 6:55-59
- His parents are exemplary in their piety – Luke 1:6
- His parents had not children and were too old to expect any children – Luke 1:7

### The Priestly Pronouncement

- G. Campbell Morgan describes the bleak setting of the time: "The king is there, degenerate. The Temple is there, desecrated. The priesthood is there, degraded. The people are there, debased."
- The course of Abiah is the 8<sup>th</sup> in order, and their first week of service likely fell after Shavuot/Pentecost (early June).
- Each day lots were cast to assign certain of the daily tasks in the Temple, this day the lot to offer incense (not sure if morning or evening) fell on Zacharias.
  - "The offering of the incense was the highest honor that could come to a priest, and as it was determined by lot, it might not come more than once in a lifetime to the same man." - Carroll
- Zacharias is alone in the Temple offering incense and praying (no doubt including his desire for a son) when the angel Gabriel appears – Luke 1:11
  - Gabriel also appears in response to Daniel's prayer – Daniel 9:20-21
- The nature of John's birth and life are announced:
  - His arrival will bring great joy – Luke 1:14
  - His life will be consecrated to God's service – Luke 1:15
    - The prohibition of strong drink indicates either a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:3) or priestly service (Leviticus 10:9).
  - His impact on Israel will be great – Luke 1:16
  - His role is like that of the promised Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6) – Luke 1:17
- Zacharias's doubt and request for a sign are met with him being struck speechless until John's birth – Luke 1:18-20
  - An echo of curse mentioned in Malachi 4:6?
- These events created a tremendous stir among the Jews – Luke 1:21-22

## The Prenatal Prophet

- Shortly after Zacharias's responsibilities end at the Temple, Elisabeth conceives – Luke 1:24
- Elisabeth hides her pregnancy for five months – Luke 1:24
  - This is either hopeful caution that she would have the child (vs. 25) or to ensure the child's separation from the womb (see Judges 13:14).
- When Elisabeth is roughly six months along, Mary visits after Gabriel had appeared to her announcing the coming Christ – Luke 1:39-40
- John leaps in his mother's womb at Mary's arrival, beginning his role as the forerunner of Christ even before birth – Luke 1:41

## The Birth of John

- John is born around the time of Passover (late April).
- There is great celebration at his birth – Luke 1:57-58
- At John's circumcision, the people attempt to name him after his father – Luke 1:59
  - It would be customary to take the name of a close relative.
- Elisabeth insists the boy be named John, and Zacharias communicates the same – Luke 1:60-63
  - John (Greek *Johannes*, Hebrew *Yohanan*) means "God has been gracious".
- Zacharias's tongue is loosed, and he burst out in praise/prophecy – Luke 1:64, 67-79
- These events are well-known in all of Israel, creating an anticipation for John's coming ministry – Luke 1:65-66
- John spends his early life in obscurity – Luke 1:80