

The Birth of John the Baptist December 03, 2017

Luke 1:57-66

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. 60 But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." 61 They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." 62 Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. 63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

The Journey through the Bible is a continuing story from the announcement of the two births to the meeting of the mothers followed by awesome praise and thanksgiving. Now today, the journey continues with the birth of the forerunner to Christ.

I will attempt to put the scenario in perspective. We come to church and we worship and we do it on a regular basis. Once a week it becomes a habit, a routine. We do pretty much the same thing over and over and it becomes our tradition. Today I introduce to you the concept of endearing understanding. Endearing is something that is lovable, adorable, or dear to you. What I encourage is that you have an endearing understanding of why we do what we do. With an endearing understanding of the word a warm spiritual well being grows inside the worshiper to where we worship God out of sincere admiration and heartfelt appreciation.

The Bible is concise; it reveals only the facts. There is nothing that is sugarcoated. Nothing is written for the sake of drama. So, as we go through our Journey of the Bible we go from one Bible scene to the next. But I invite you to take time to reflect on the events and consider the many variables that could exist, all of the emotions of the key players, the stress and uncertainty, and the dynamics of the culture. When we take the time to reflect we develop an endearing understanding of the scriptures. We formulate a sincere appreciation for what God has done for us.

What happens in today's Scripture is easy to read. It is easy to follow and easy to understand. It is easy to talk about and it is easy to know the story. But I would like for us to get beyond the story to a deeper level of understanding to where we have a sincere appreciation, admiration, endearing understanding of the word.

The Story is this. Now it is time for Elizabeth to give birth. So, the community rejoices with her because she is no longer cursed for her inability to give Zechariah a son. The proud parents do the traditional thing on the 8th day. They have a ceremony of circumcision which was a special custom in that culture. It was a time of great joy and sacredness. It symbolizes that the son is joining the covenant with the other males to live under God's laws. This is when they name the child. Tradition is that he will be given a family name but instead they name him John. Suddenly Zachariah, the father, is able to talk. He had been silenced for nine months because he doubted the angel. Now he praises God. The neighbors get scared and everybody talks about it because they know something is going on. That's the story.

When I did a sermon on the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist I mentioned that everybody was doing their daily routines, they were busy and things would be going on around them that they were unaware of. The event was big news but this news went untold. People did

not know about it. When Angel Gabriel confronted Zechariah it was big news but for this big news event everyone else was unaware of it. Now the people are talking. They are excited because they know something is going on. They don't know exactly what it is but they know something is happening.

For an endearing understanding we ask questions. We reflect upon why this is done. Why is this happening this way? What is going on? In our Scripture today the story unfolds one step at a time. But it is not just the words. It is the movement behind the scenes and the divine magnificence behind it all.

With an endearing understanding we realize something about what is going on behind the scenes. It is not that Elizabeth is giving birth to a son. It is not that Elizabeth is now a good wife and finally delivers a boy for the honor of her husband. It is oh wow! This is the forerunner to Christ. This is it! Here he is! This is the beginning of advent when God delivers the promised Messiah. Here is the one who will pave the way for the coming Lord. The first eye witness. The first living testimony. The one that will point so many people to Jesus the Christ. The endearing understanding can give you goose bumps. Because it is not just another story, not just another scene. This is it! This is what the scriptures said was going to happen. **Malachi 3:1** See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me.

When you realize the magnitude of it, you can't help but stand in awe. This is God's invasion into history - a time when God takes action for us. I want to make sure we get this. God is taking action for us. It is not just the people in the Bible; not just the Hebrews, the nation of Israel, the descendents of Abraham. This is the most significant time ever in history - when advent is upon us. Most significant of all this is God taking action for us.

With an endearing understanding we love the traditions because we appreciate the meaning behind it all. Advent is not just something that we do. Advent is a time of preparation for the birth of Christ. It is a time of reflection, appreciation, and admiration. It is a time of heartfelt gratitude that is expressed through hope, peace, joy, and love. We are saved. We are redeemed. Not because we have successfully made the effort to come to God. But because God made the effort to come to us. We stand in awe because our endearing understanding brings us awareness of God's presence in our lives. The season of Advent gives us time to prepare for his coming glory. Let us pause from the frenzy of December and rejoice.