

Sermon – 1st Advent
Luke 1:67-79
December 3, 2017
“And You My Child...Are Great”

Luke 1:67-79 is a song of praise and the occasion is the birth of child. Baby news is happy news. On the 7th of February in 1993, I became a father for the very first time. We named her John too – well Johanna actually - but she was called that in honor of her late grandfather, Marcella’s dad John. We weren’t expecting nor lamenting having a girl instead of a boy – it’s just that Grandpa John, who’d died a few years earlier, was on our mind and in our hearts when our firstborn came.

We were delighted that day. And like other parents it didn’t take long for you to notice this trait and that giftedness and start speculating on what they might grow up to be. Of course I never much thought of Johanna as someone who would be “*called a prophet of the Most High - going on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.*” Truth be told, in February 1993 I never thought I would be doing *this* on Sunday mornings!

What strikes me about this “*Song of Zechariah*” is not that he’s happy to have welcomed a child into his home - amazed actually (Luke tells us earlier he and his wife were quite old with no previous baby news). What amazes me is that when he sings, he is glad foremost for what his child will mean to Israel. Sure, Zechariah most definitely thinks of John as “my son”. But he is thrilled because his own son is going to prepare people for God’s own Son, Jesus.

None of us will ever have a child like John the Baptist. Jesus himself even said so. In Luke 7:28 he said; “*I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.*” Zechariah knew from the moment an angel appeared to him while he was on duty in the temple and announced he would have a child that his John would be one of most important men in history. Still, in his song he thanked God not for the fame his son would attain, but that his son would bring others to God’s Son. Zechariah’s faith was outwardly oriented so as to be grateful for what his child would mean to others even more than what holding that boy in his old arms and watching him grow meant to him.

No one knows how long Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth lived after John was born. Not a word about how they raised him is found anywhere in the Bible. John was a priest’s son, so he might have had a slight leg up on the other Jewish kids in religion class, but that’s all we know! The important thing about the “*Song of Zechariah*”, aside from all it’s beautiful language about Israel’s history and their covenant with God is what John means to God and to the world God was in a whole new way calling to salvation through Jesus Christ. Everyone who is graced to be a parent can thus learn a “parenting” lesson from Zechariah.

Our kids are our kids, and we love them and as parents do the best we can by them – we rock them to sleep and read them stories, in the 2nd grade we go over the spelling of those irritating English homonyms and in the 7th grade algebra problems (if we remember ourselves that is) and we show them how to shoot free throws and ride a bike and appreciate art. And we teach them about God, how to pray and why being humble and generous and compassionate is not just good manners but really and truly what it means to be like their Savior Jesus.

But I wonder how many of us ever think about our kids the way Zechariah thought about his – as a promise of God to the world, and a promise kept by God to Zechariah’s ancestor Abraham to bless the world through his children and that our Lord thus graces us with children not just for our sake but for the sake of the world. I wonder if we dare think that we are raising young “*John the Baptists*” – young people who one day will “*prepare the way of the Lord*” for another human being who needs that Lord and his unending love as much as we do.

Perhaps you didn’t get any angelic revelations before your son or daughter was born, but you do have the word of Christ concerning you and your children. In the same Luke 7:28 that I quoted a moment ago Jesus went on to say; “*yet the one who is the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*” – that he of course being John. Imagine that. That ‘*least in the kingdom*’ is you and me and the kids God blesses us with. It’s daunting, quite counter cultural, but thoroughly biblical for us to have such an amazing thought. All over the world God is using people just like you to prepare someone’s heart to receive his Son Jesus. It is a gift, and it is our task, but it is also why the Christians ought to sing – just like ol Zechariah. AMEN