

Christmas Season... The Other Folks in the Story

John the Baptist

I. John the Baptist was Christ's ambassador.

His birth preceded Jesus' birth by about six months. Luke describes John's birth in some detail. He followed things "from the start" (verse 3) and his source was Mary.

Let's take a look at Luke 1:5-80.

A. John's Parents

Zacharias: A priest of the division course of Abijah (1 of 24) 1 Chr. 24:10. His name means "Jehovah has remembered."

Elisabeth: A kinsmen (probably cousin) of Mary (Jeremiah/Ezekial also). Belonged to the family of Aaron. Her name means "God is my oath."

1. Both are priestly in their heritage and are described as "being righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless." (Luke 1:6)
2. They are both old...beyond childbirth years and Elisabeth is barren.
3. Zacharias was a "day-class" type of priest. Each class (24 of them – see 1 Chr. 24:7-18 and 2 Chr. 8:14), several a week in the temple – twice a year. The whole class served on the Sabbath and the feast of Tabernacles.

B. The Angel's Announcement: 1:8-14

1. The incense was kindled twice a day (dawn and late afternoon) by a priest chosen by lot (a white stone – see Revelation 2:17). They could only do it once in a lifetime. It was a special day for Zacharias.
2. The altar of incense – inside the holy place not the Holy of Holies. He put frankincense on the coals.
3. The angel appears...Gabriel – mentioned four times (Dan. 8:16 and 9:21 to many, Luke 1:26 – 28 and here with Zacharias) announced John's name..."Jehovah has been gracious."

C. John's Job will be 1:15 -17

1. Great in the work of the Messianic Kingdom.
2. He shall avoid all kinds of liquor.
3. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit – before birth

4. He shall turn back...

Repentance – The plea of the Old Testament prophets (see Isa. 55:7, Joel 2:12 and Hos. 14:1)

5. To be the Messiah's forerunner...look at Malachi 4:5-6...John is the fulfillment – the second Elijah.

6. Jesus praised John as the greatest of all prophets (Matt. 11:11). He was popular with the people...(Matt. 21:31-32, Mk. 11:27-32, Lk. 7:29-30, Jn. 10:41)

D. Zacharias' Protest and Unbelief – 1:18

1. Same as Abraham did in Genesis 15:8

2. The consequence – he could not speak until the day of John's circumcision (1:63)

E. Mary visits with Elizabeth - 1:39-56

F. John's birth – 1:57-66

1. His circumcision – 8th day

2. His name – not Zacharias

G. Zacharias' Prophecy – 1:67-79

His brief sermon is made up of just 2 sentences. (1) verses 67-75 and (2) verse 76-79.

H. Little is said about John's childhood (1:80). Similar to Jesus' childhood – see Lk. 2:40 and 52.

II. John's preaching ministry starts in Matthew 3:1

15th year of reign of Tiberius Caesar 26/27 AD

His authenticity is affirmed in verse 3 – see Isa. 40:3

A. His profile (Mk. 1:3-4, Lk. 3:10-14)

1. Dress – Description bears a striking similarity to that of Elijah leather belt (2 Kings 1:8).

2. Diet – Locusts (Lev. 11:22)

B. His baptizing

“As they were confessing their sins” – Outward confession flowed out of an inward repentance. Gentile converts to Judaism washed themselves as a form of ceremonial cleansing. See Lev. 11-15.

C. His message

While in prison – sent 2 disciples to ask whether Christ was the Messiah (Matt. 11:2-3), Lk. 7:18-23). God's wrath in the coming judgment – verse 7 fire, verse 10 ax, verse 13 winnowing of grain.

D. His goal – to identify a prepared remnant with the King. He forced people to make a decision.

III. So what?

The birth of Christ is not just a story about a cute underprivileged kid born in grave clothes. It's a story that should force people to make a decision...who are you going to serve?

Discussion Questions:

1. What parallels do you see between Isaac and John the Baptist? Between Abraham and Zacharias?
2. Zacharias' message (Luke 1:67-79) was made up of just a couple of sentences that were filled with Old Testament references. What does that suggest to you? Is your communication like that? Why not?