

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

In the gospel of Luke, John the Baptist has quite a big part. If you don't remember, John has been discussed a little already in Luke's gospel, even though we didn't hear it. In Chapter 1, we could read about the story of Zechariah, the priest, and hearing an angel talk to him about his son who will be John. We hear Elizabeth talk about her son, and her from Elizabeth how her son, John, leapt in her womb when Mary came to visit and he was in the presence of his Lord and Savior.

Today, we get to see the world in which John was born. He was born into a world where there were already tremendous powers at work. There is the Emperor Tiberius. There's the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. There's Herod and Philip, rulers of Ituraea and Trachonitis. There is Lysanias, ruler of Abilene. These are all tremendous powers and it is into this that John, and Jesus too, are born into.

So what is John the Baptist's role in the midst of all of this for Luke? Well, as we continue on, we will discover more and more that John in Luke's gospel is the voice that says to everyone, God's promises are coming, or more correctly stated, God's promises are here. Don't despair. God promised Zechariah a son. Zechariah has a son, and it's John. Elizabeth was barren and God hears her cry and gives her a son. When the angel Gabriel is talking to Mary, Gabriel tells Mary that nothing is impossible for God. What a wonderful message for all of these people to hear. God's promises are still achieved in the midst of all the struggles that are going on in the lives of God's people. In the midst of all the powers of rulers, emperors, governors, etc., God's power is not diminished in the least. We might not see it at first, but it happens. Zechariah couldn't believe what had happened to him by God's power. He couldn't even speak of it. Mary is astonished that God could use her, a young woman in a patriarchal society, but God did work through her. Elizabeth may not even have known that Zechariah was promised a son, and in her old age still conceived a son, John.

And then John himself, we are told, is the promise made by God in Isaiah that he is the one crying in the wilderness about how we need to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus. In fact, John is the incarnation of God's promises. At the end of the verses from Isaiah, we are told that salvation is truly promised to us, and not only to us according to Luke, but that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." We hear these words of promise because John is the incarnation of God's promises, and God's promise is that all flesh shall see the salvation of God. This is John. This is John's message, or maybe better said, is that this is God's message that is spoken through the life and mouth of John.

John cries out, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." What does this mean? How are we to prepare the way of our Lord. When we look at John, he was literally the one who prepared the way of Jesus' ministry. John is the one who is literally out there, baptizing people and witnessing to the one who is coming, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is coming into the world. Prepare the way? How is it that we will stand up before God in the midst of a troubled and hurting world? John asks us how, in the midst of all the rulers around us in the social, religious and medical worlds, are we going to stand up? Will we hear the people like Zechariah and Elizabeth in our lives, or will we only hear those in power? In other words, will we

be there for people like Elizabeth who are disgraced by the people around her. Will we hear the prayers of the dreams of those around us who have lost hope? Will we see the value of young women in our society? Or will we bow to the powers around us? John is the embodiment of God's promises, he is the incarnation of promises God has made to all flesh. We, through the power of the Holy Spirit, also have that ability. We can be the embodiment of God's promises if we accept the power of the Holy Spirit. We can be God's body in the world and in the midst of all the world's struggles, we can bring hope to all we meet. Prepare the way of the Lord. In the midst of chaos, let the Holy Spirit work through you and bring order. In the midst of suffering, let the Holy Spirit work through you to bring healing. In the midst of oppression, let the Holy Spirit bring you the ability to raise the voices of those who have lost their voice. Prepare the way of the Lord. Let salvation come to all flesh. Amen