

Advent 4 It Takes a Village to Make a Baptist

Sermon 12/23/18; Ken Wilson

Spent Advent with Luke 1. First, a priest name Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth receive notice that Elizabeth in her old age will bear a son to be called *Johanan* or John. Stunned, Zechariah doesn't speak for 9 months. Then, 6 months into Elizabeth's pregnancy, word of another pregnancy is sent to a young woman in Galilee, named Miriam or Mary. An independent-minded young woman, Mary then visits her cousin Elizabeth and busts out in prophetic song worthy of one of Hebrew prophets of old. Today, we come to the birth of John-Baptist. See? Primed for x-mas eve ...

Let's read the first half of our text on your sheet.

Neighbors show up on 8th day for the circumcision, called the *bris* (one dad I know, a big b-ball fan, hosting a bris in his home for newborn—when guest had arrived, he announced when to expect the ceremony to begin: “Tip off at 10 everyone!”)

Comedic elements to Luke's narration of Zechariah-Elizabeth.

Remember these stories were told more than read—acted out.

When Zechariah gets news in temple that Elizabeth will become pregnant, he's struck mute—he came out of temple and gesture with his hands to tell the news. Comedic, imagine what particular hand gesture he might use to say he & Elizabeth were going to get it on and have a baby? Let us not speculate at this time.

9months later, neighbors try to communicate with still mute Zechariah by “making motions”—OK he's mute, not deaf. But Zechariah has been motioning to them to communicate, so they naturally mirror him, forgetting he's mute, not deaf. It's like when you catch yourself raising your voice to speak to someone who has less than the best English. They are not deaf, just learning English!

Naming scene is funny. Noticed how people get really nosey with pregnant women—*how far along are you? What's gender? Was it a surprise?* When baby comes, people ask: when did you lose your mucus plug, what was baby's apgar?

Here, nosey neighbors come barge over for the bris, start telling parents what child should be named. Traditional village—clear naming protocols! Has to be a family member/ancestor! Elizabeth butts in “His name is Johanan”—a breach of family

tradition. They don't like that answer, so they all turn en masse to Zechariah and start gesturing (even though he's mute, not deaf) and in that chaotic scene, he gestures for a tablet and backs his wife: His name is Johanan. The goys will call him John and the Southern Baptists will claim him as patron saint.

If you're going home for Christmas and Aunt Dorithea gets on your case for a breach of some x-mas tradition on your part, tell her the x-mas story features several tradition-busting elements and then offer to get her some more spiked hot apple cider.

But there's a serious point to all this humor and frivolity embedded in our reading today. These were people under enormous stress-pressure, living in difficult unfriendly-to-them times. So they took time to celebrate each other.

In Matthew, we just have John the Baptist thundering like a prophet in the wilderness. Don't see what Luke wants us to see that his birth was celebrated by crazy neighbors, starting with

"Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy." And then all the antics. Followed by Zechariah new-found voice—praising God and declaring God's redemption as if it's already happened....

And it's clear this little boy is the talk of the town for some time: ***All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.***⁶⁶ ***Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.***

Makes you wonder if all that positive attention isn't a bit much for John, and his move to the desert later in life wasn't to get away from all the hype and speculation.

But still, he grew up celebrated, and that was part of his strength to speak truth to power in the name of the Lord.

It bothers me, really bothers me, that many in our congregation are not celebrated as they ought to be when they go back home to families. Some are there getting a dose of that crazy making Christian love that say, "Oh I love you, honey, but I'm so disappointed

by your chosen lifestyle” ... Or whatever family or society dysfunction and flat out injustice keeps people from being celebrated by their village.

And this where and why I want honor our guests (who are also, in a way, our hosts) James Rhodenhiser and Jayin Wavrick.

Story of meeting James

Inter-Faith Roundtable

For a long time—years—one of few people I could speak to freely about my growing concerns of LGBTQ without penalty.

When we had the troubles that led to this church forming, James was first person I texted to say, “Well, leaving the old place and starting a new one.” As soon as he got text, he replied, “Need a place to meet? About our Social Hall?”

And then when we got here (Jan. 2015) it was like we were Zechariah and Elizabeth with these wonderful supportive neighbors at St. Clare’s stopping by, hugging, cheering us.

That was so important and healing because we had been surrounded by anxiety and fear and disapproval!

You probably know James introduced me to Julia. But might not realize that when you lose a much beloved spouse and then later, start dating, it’s distressing-upsetting to people who are still grieving. Paul warned me about this. It’s really hard to be newly happy after a season of loss and be surrounded by that anxiety.

But there again James, and especially Jayin were flat out rejoicing—practically giddy with joy for us.

So they have been and always will be very much part of our story here at Blue Ocean. We better do well to make them proud.

I’m proud of this church, but they have every reason to be proud of church they are leaving for a new challenge. (Genesis partnership—InterFaith pioneers) Launching Happenings in Diocese of Michigan

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Luke 1: 57-80)

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. ⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, ⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” ⁶¹ They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” ⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:
⁶⁸ “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn^[a] of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” ⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit^[b]; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.