

John The Baptist, Jesus Favorite Cousin

by Evangelist Dea Warford

(All Scripture References are from the New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1981; unless otherwise noted)

Word: (An Angel told Zacharias), "And he (John the Baptist) shall go before Him (Jesus) in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:17

Wisdom: The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist is written as an actual part of the Christmas story, yet little if any connection between John and Jesus is mentioned at Christmas time. I, for one, believe that there is a very important lesson for us all, especially now, since it is so closely related to Christmas and Christ's first coming.

Before Mary's supernatural conception of Jesus, there was a supernatural conception of John. Mary's cousin, Elizabeth was aged and barren, but an angel appeared to her husband, Zacharias, and announced that Elizabeth would have a son. How could this be? The angel explained, "With God nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37). John, like his second cousin, Jesus, was also a miracle baby, though his father was a man.

John was born about 6 months before Jesus. John had a special calling on earth, as our daily verse says: "to go before Him . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." The purpose of Christmas was to bring a Savior to earth. Three decades after the first Christmas, the Savior's ministry began, leading up to His death and resurrection. But, before His ministry ever started, John began preaching for people to repent. Read about his ministry in Luke chapter 3.

John's ministry was so important that without it, the people would not have been ready to respond to Christ's ministry. And, his work was so important that it was actually predicted in Scripture hundreds of years before his preaching began: "I will send Elijah (John was prophetically referred to as "Elijah" since that name served as a metaphor for John's similarly powerful and anointed ministry) before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:5, 6).

I believe (and I am certainly not the only theologian who believes this!) that even as John the Baptist was the metaphorical New Testament counterpart to Elijah (his ministry was in the "spirit and power of Elijah") preparing the way of the Lord's first coming, Christmas; even so the Church of Jesus Christ will, in the last days, prepare the way for Christ's second coming in the "spirit and power of Elijah".

The Christmas story which explains Christ's journey on earth was not complete without mentioning the story of John the Baptist. He was the forerunner helping soften hearts and bringing restoration to families so that they could receive the true meaning of Christ's first coming (not giving or family as TV programs and Christmas movies try to emphasize, but a Savior come to bring salvation to lost mankind!).

So, like John, in the last days we (the church) will bring restoration to families so that they will be ready to receive the true meaning of Christ's second coming: an escape from eternal punishment and the beginning of eternal life.

Read the whole story of John's birth in Luke 1 and his ministry in Luke 3. Try to visualize how his ministry foreshadows our future ministry

Christmas is the glorious time to celebrate Christ's first coming. The story of John the Baptist reveals the important part that even one man can play in helping God's plan unfold to others. Christmas is not just about Jesus, it is about John the Baptist in a very real way. And, Christ's second coming will also involve you and I in helping others get ready.

We don't know how many more Christmases are left until it's our time to do this essential last days work. But, meanwhile, we can prepare our hearts by living a holy and abstemious life like John did (Luke 1:15).

John leaped in his mother's womb when Mary and her uterus borne Christ-child came near (Luke 1:21: *there's got to be a lesson against abortion in this verse!*). Let's also "leap" and rejoice in this season of celebration for the Christ-child: "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!"

Prayer: "Father, let me be like John the Baptist helping others prepare for your second coming. May this Christmas serve as a reminder that you came for a very high purpose and that in the last days, I'll have high purpose also."

Confession: "John pointed others to Christ. I'll do the same this Christmas season."