



LUKE

YOU CAN BE CERTAIN...

Connect group questions

Luke 1:5-25 Certain... that John the Baptist was a gift from God

1. Why do we crave certainty about things? Mark said – “we want certainty about our finances, our family, our health, our future”. Anything else? What do you most want certainty about?
2. Are you personally certain about Jesus? What causes you to doubt?

Luke says we can be certain:

About John – read Luke 1:5-17

3. Why does Luke start with Zechariah and why locate it in terms of history and geography?
4. Zechariah and Elizabeth had had no children. What are some of the issues that raises for such a godly couple both then and now? What was Mark’s strong point to those in this situation today?
5. Have you been surprised by the Lord’s answer to prayer at a time you least expected it?
6. What are the signs that Zechariah and Elizabeth’s baby would be no ordinary son?

Fulfilling the promise – read Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1 and 4:5

7. John will be this forerunner!! What does that mean in terms of God’s promise to redeem Israel?
8. Why does Zechariah have trouble comprehending/believing all Gabriel has said? What do we learn from Gabriel’s response to Zechariah’s doubts?
9. Mark said God speaks to us through his Word, as clearly as Gabriel spoke to Zechariah! Mark shared that he sometimes puts himself *above* God’s word, not *under* it. What did he mean by that? How should we read God’s word today?

That someone will prepare the way of the Lord – read Luke 1:18-25

10. Gabriel announces that John would make ready a people prepare for the Lord in three ways:
 - a. Bring back to God, many people of Israel
 - b. Turn the hearts of parents (or fathers) to their children
 - c. Turn the disobedient to the ways of the righteous.

Explore what that meant in the 1st century, and then what it means for us now, as we prepare for the Lord’s (second) coming.

Take homes

11. **Answered prayer** – how can we become people who wait patiently for prayer to be answered and not be surprised when it is - trusting God’s great wisdom and perfect timing?
12. **Heading God’s word:** how can we make sure we accept God’s word when he speaks to us through the Bible, revelling in God’s promises and obeying his commands?
13. **Being ready** for the coming of the Lord. Returning if we’ve wandered off, serving our families, and if we’re not yet Christian – repenting and believing the Good News. Pray we’ll be a people prepared!

Please pray for our annual meeting and for the many people who are part of our church who particularly need our prayer at the moment. Continue to pray that the Lord may intervene to make possible the appointment of an assistant minister.

Date: 10th February 2019
Services: 730, 930 Tewartin and Peregian (via video)
Series: Luke: you can be certain
Title: ... that John the Baptist was a gift from God
Passage: Luke 1:5-25
Outline: **Certain**
...about John
...fulfilling the promise
...about preparing the way of the Lord

INTRODUCTION

- What many people want today is **certainty**...
- We **want** it – we **crave** it – but it is **allusive**
- The people of **Townsville** – want some certainty about when they can get their **houses** and **lives** back together – as do those in **Tasmania** and **Victoria** with the bushfires
- **Farmers** across QLD want certainty about **help** in the light of devastating **stock losses**...
- **Irrigators** want certainty about the **Murry-Darling Basin**
- **Business and private investors** want **certainty** about the **implementation** of the **recommendations** of the Royal Commission...
- The people of **Venezuela** want certainty about the future of the government and their country...
- The people of **Britain** want certainty about **Brexit**
- And in the **States** about the threat of another **government shutdown** //
- And in our own lives... we want certainty about our **finances**, our **family**, our **health**, our **future**...
- But only **some** of all that is possible...!! //
- We live in a world that says truth is **relative** and that we mustn't **claim** things are **true** in any **absolute sense**...
- ...and so it seems even **less** likely that we can be certain about **God**... about the claims of **Christ**... //
- But Luke **opens** his biography of Jesus by making just that claim – as we saw **last week**....
- **Theophilus** – whoever he was – has been taught *some* things about **Jesus** – Luke wants him to know that he can be **certain** about the things he's been **taught**...
- That's a **staggering claim** isn't it? – for both the **1st century** and the **21st century** – that we can be **certain** about **Jesus**...
- ... it's what **Theophilus** needed –
- ...it's what **YOU** need...
- ...it's what **Noosa** and **Peregian** needs... to be **certain** about **Jesus Christ**...
- So here is where we are heading this morning...

You can be certain

1. ...about John
2. ...fulfilling the promise
3. ...that someone will prepare the way of the Lord

- Luke has set about to give us an **orderly account** –
- ...and his **orderly account** begins not with someone named '*Jesus*' – where the other three gospels begin – but with someone named **John**...

1. ABOUT JOHN

- in fact it begins with John's **dad**...
- Have a look with me at v5 - *In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah...*
- Notice what Luke **does** in his "orderly account" - he locates what he is telling us about, in **time** and **place**... in both in **history** and **geography**...
- Religious works are often somewhat **ethereal** and **ahistorical** - but what Luke tells us here can be **historically validated**... this happened at **that** time - that **specific** time when **Herod was King in Judea...**//
- ..but we might well think - "this is a strange place to start... he deems the announcement of John the Baptist's **birth** to his **father**, as the important **first event** to record in his **orderly account** about **Jesus**....
- Why? - because that's the way it **happened**...!
- an "**orderly account**"... is going start at the **beginning**... (... a very good place to start!)
- and this means of course, we're now on **notice**... if **this** is where he starts his account of **Jesus**... this **has** to be significant!! //
- so what's it **about**? - **why** is it **important**?
- John's parents were both devoted to the service of God... they were **blameless** - that doesn't mean **sinless** - but means nobody could point a **finger** at them, as it were...
- and yet **sadly** - they were **childless**... often seen in the **ancient** world as a sign God had **withheld** his blessing in some way...
- (let me say that if **you** struggled to have children... while the Lord used childlessness in specific ways in Scriptures to bring about his purpose... there is no indication in Scripture that **your** struggle to have children is an way related to **punishment**, or to **sin**... // It is **hard**... **really** hard... and God may well use it to draw you **closer** to him... but please don't conclude that it **was/is** a **punishment** or something like that!!) //
- Well - in the case of **Zechariah and Elizabeth**, God powerfully **intervenes**... as was so often the case in OT accounts...
- Zechariah is on a **roster**... rosters have been around a while... and he's serving as a **priest** - in fact he's been chosen for one of the most **coveted roles** - that of **offering incense**... and suddenly an **angel appeared** to him...
- That would freak **anyone** out wouldn't it..? -
- I'm glad I wasn't there because Susan is always saying I have a **very sensitive startle reflex**... I would have **jumped** for sure...!
- And sure enough, we read that Zechariah **startled** and was **gripped with fear**...
- We're not told what the angel **looked like**... though we'd **love** to know - no - Luke is much more interested in what he **said** than what he **looks like** //
- Have a look with me at v13 - *Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your **prayer** has been **heard**. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John*
- **What** prayer has been heard? - presumably - though we can't be sure - Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayer for a **child**... doubtless a **constant prayer** for them over the **years**...
- ...and just like **us** when we've prayed for something earnestly over a long period of time - we get **surprised** when the answer comes (!) - so was **Zechariah**... especially as he **so helpfully points out** to the angel - that and **he** and his **wife** are **past it**!
- But there are **more** surprises in store for Zechariah - for this son is to be no **ordinary** son - not only will **Zechariah** and **Elizabeth** rejoice - but **many** will rejoice at his birth... he will be **great** not just in his **parents'** eyes but in the **eyes** of the **Lord** - someone pretty significant... you'd be forgiven for thinking he was talking about the **Messiah himself**!

- **Teetotaller** – sign of someone **special** in **OT** – undertook special **vow**... related to the devoted service of the Lord...
- he will be filled with the **HS** from **birth**... in the OT only **kings** and **prophets** were filled with the **HS** – it was a **special gift** for **special times** - but that's not what we see here... //
- so - what is going **on** here?
- **Who** is this person to be born and what does he have to do with **Jesus**?
- Luke wants us to be certain that this John whose arrival he announces is:

2. FULFILLING THE PROMISE

- **What** promise?
- There are at least 3-4 places in the Old Testament where we see that **before** the Messiah comes, there will be someone coming to **prepare the way**....
- So in **Isaiah 40:3** - *A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."*
- **Malachi 3:1** - *"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me."*
- Or again in **Malachi 4:5** *I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.*
- ...before the Messiah came, there was always going to be someone who prepared the way for him... one in the **Spirit** of or **like** Elijah who will call people back into relationship with **God** and with **one another**.
- How? What did Gabriel say to Zechariah? – v16 – have a look - *He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*
- Zechariah would have been **familiar** with these passages... he would have heard the prophecies... of one coming before the Lord //
- ...now he is to understand that his **son John will be that man!!**
- ...and **THAT** means in turn... that the coming of the **Lord** – the **long awaited Messiah** – is not far around the **corner!** //
- God is about to step into the world to **fulfil** his **promise** to **redeem** – **rescue** the world!! //
- That moment that the whole of OT anticipates – longs for – looks forward to... is on the doorstep!! //
- Now Zechariah thinks all this sounds pretty **unlikely** – if not **preposterous**
- **He's** old, his wife is **old** - he points out...
- But then Gabriel comes back strongly – did you see that in v19? – have a look - *"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.*
- In other words - who do you think you are talking back to me and questioning me? He continues:
- v 20 *And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."*
- That is the kind of reply designed to **silence** a **doubter**.. and in fact Gabriel now disciplines Zechariah by telling him he'll now spend the entire pregnancy in **silence**...
- Some would be **relieved** if they didn't have to say anything for the next 9 months...
-and others would rather **die** than be deprived of speech!
- Why did God choose **this** particular discipline?
- To teach the value of **God's words**...
- God had gone to the trouble of communicating **very clearly** with **Zechariah** but **Zechariah** had not

believed what he had been told...

- So **he'll** have **NO** words because he did not **accept** – the words of **Gabriel**...which were the **words** of **God!**
- God's words are more **precious** than what Zechariah's response would imply... more **trustworthy** – more **dependable** – more **true**...
- Zechariah should not have so readily **dismissed** God's words...! //
- And **neither should we**...!//
- God speaks to **us** today through his word... as **clearly** and **wonderfully** as **Gabriel** spoke to **Zechariah** that day... and it seems to me sometimes that I take them all too **lightly**...
- I **don't** take God at his **word**
- And I **don't** obey God's **word** as I **should**. //
- So like **Zechariah** – I put myself **over** God's **word** instead of God's **word** being over **me!** //
- Friends we **can** and **should** take God at his word... - **revelling** in his **promises** and **obeying** his **commands**... ///
- So.... Luke says we can be certain about John fulfilling the promise...

3. THAT SOMEONE WILL PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

- what was to be involved in 'preparing the way'?
- **Great people** – have **people** go ahead of them to prepare the way
- President **USA** comes to **Aust.** masses of people who come before to **prepare** the **way**... even the **VP** – end of last year – using Cairns as an overnight base for a conference in Port Moresby... the preparation **beforehand** was enormous... the logistics **huge**...
- Now I don't know if you've noticed, but no one goes ahead of **me** to prepare the way for **me** entering a **building** or a **room**
- I just **walk in** - often without **anyone noticing!**
- And what about **you?** – I'm guessing there's no **ovation** or **fanfare** or **recognition** either!
- Hate to break it to you but that's because we're not that **important!**
- But for the **truly** important people – for **great** people – they **do** need people to go ahead and prepare the way..
- ...to make sure they get the **reception** and **recognition** and sometimes **protection** that they need
- And the presence of John the **Baptist** here at the start of Luke's orderly account, has the **same effect**.
- It tells us at the very **least**, that the one he prepares the way for, the one who comes **after** him, is someone **great** – someone of **profound importance**...!
- ...this tells us enough about him that when he **comes**,// we **ought to sit up and pay careful attention!**
- so what was **involved** in the preparation?
- Vv16-17 – have a look - *He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*"
- Three things: all related I'm sure
- **(1) Bring back many people of Israel to the Lord** – remember God's own people – to the Lord their God... for despite all they'd been through – both northern and southern kingdom turfed out of God's promised land in turn – then brought back... and yet they had **still** wandered away.
- **(2) Turn the hearts of the parents to their children** – the original has 'fathers' ... it could refer to family unity under threat at the time... when children were generally devalued...

- And (3), turn **the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous**. That's **confronting** isn't... disobedience is **foolishness**... **wisdom** is **fleeing evil** and having an overwhelming **awe** and **wonder** of **God!** //
- **That** is how John will 'make ready a people prepared for the Lord'.
- And you might be thinking – hang on – very interesting Mark – or you may not even be thinking that (!) – but what does **this** have to do with **me?** //
- Jesus is **coming**..... we saw that clearly in December...! He's coming **again!**
- And **we** must be ready... through the same **means**
- Ensuring that we - God's own people - have either **NOT** wandered off - or if we **have** – that we have **returned** to the ways of the Lord.
- It's possible that even though you're here this morning... you've **wandered off**... //
- You're basically doing your own **thing**, God is not on the **scene**. I want to urge you today... **return** to the **ways** of the **Lord**... so you are **prepared** for his **coming**.
- And there may be families **fractured**... parents consumed with everything **else** but the care of their children...
- ...it seems to me there can be **2 issues** – either children become **idols** and **they** rule the roost – and the parents just run round doing what **they** say – or parents are so **consumed** by **career** or **sport** or **hobbies** or something else that children only get the **left overs**... and **both** are **wrong**...
- **Fascinating** that this is one of the issues... John will address by way of preparing the way of the Lord... /
- And we need to address them in **our** lives – so **we** are also prepared for the **coming** of the **Lord!**
- **Finally** – turning the **hearts** of the **disobedient** to the **wisdom** of the **righteous**...
- People who have **never come** to Jesus to say 'sorry' and turn **away** from a life lived for self... is that **you?**
- Turn your hearts from **disobedience** today... to the **only wise** way to **live** in this **world**... by **submitting** to the Lord who loves you **so** much that he sent Jesus to **live, die and rise again for you**...

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- What have we seen this morning?

You can be certain...

1. **...about John**
2. **...fulfilling the promise**
3. **...that someone will prepare the way of the Lord**

- Let me finish by recapping some of the take homes...
- **Answered prayer?** – will you be surprised when it happens – even years down the track? Or are you steadily trusting God's wisdom and timing for your prayers?
- **Hearing God's word** – as clearly today as Gabriel spoke to Zechariah... are you listening? – revelling in his promises – obeying his commands?
- **Being ready** for Jesus' coming... part of my job is to prepare the way! –
- If you've wandered **off** – return – today – surrender to Jesus as Lord
- Parents – return to your **children**... in whatever way that might mean for you...
- And finally – not Christian? – the Bible says you're not only **disobedient** – but **foolish** – and today I'm urging you to **wise up** – by **turning** to **God** – and **surrendering** your life to **him!**