

HIGHLANDS CHURCH

Study Guide

The Birth of John the Baptist

Thomas Slager
December 8, 2025

Major Points

- 1 God fulfills His promises in His time and in His way, not according to our preferred timeline or methods**

2 Peter 3:8-9

- 2 In the meantime, we ought to be found faithful like Zechariah and Elizabeth, even among a faithless generation**

Galatians 5:22-23

- 3 When God shows up, it's Christ who gets the glory — not our own efforts or righteousness**

Luke 1:64

- 4 Like the Israelites awaiting the Messiah, we live in anticipation of Christ's return with our eyes fixed on heaven**

Revelation 22:20

Key Quotes

"I think it's pretty easy to take our eyes off of Christ and put them into our calendar in fear that we might miss something that we RSVP'd yes for.

at 0:23

"Barren women, couples who cannot get pregnant, even though they're trying and even though they're seeking the Lord, it's the perfect opportunity for God's strength to show up in our own human weakness.

at 13:56

"Even the names themselves tell the story of what's going on in the birth of Zachariah.

at 19:43

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

at 32:33

"Would Christ find us this Christmas with our eyes fixed on heaven, with the words on our mouth, come Lord Jesus, come.

at 35:27

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Slager opened by talking about how easy it is to lose focus on Christ during the Christmas season. What are some specific things—even good things—that tend to pull your attention away

from the real meaning of Advent?

2. The names in this story are remarkable: Malachi ('my messenger'), Zechariah ('God remembers'), Elizabeth ('God is my oath'), Gabriel ('God is great'), and John ('God is gracious'). How does seeing these names woven together deepen your understanding of what God was doing in this moment of history?

3. Pastor Slager pointed out the contrast between Zechariah's response of doubt and Elizabeth's response of worship when they learned about John's birth. Why do you think Zechariah struggled with doubt even though he knew the Old Testament stories of God doing the impossible? Can you relate to that kind of doubt?

4. Zechariah and Elizabeth were described as 'righteous before God, walking blamelessly' even though the generation around them was 'twisted, wicked, and faithless.' What does it look like practically to live faithfully when the culture around you has largely abandoned faithfulness?

5. Pastor Slager gave four reflections at the end: trust God's timing, be faithful, give God the glory, and keep our eyes fixed on heaven. Which of these do you most need to lean into this Christmas season, and why?

Word Studies

ἄμεμπτοι
amemptoi

Greek

Without fault or blame, indicating a consistent moral integrity that is beyond legitimate accusation, not sinless perfection but covenant faithfulness.

στειρα steira

Greek

Barren or sterile, carrying deep cultural stigma in the ancient world and often serving in Scripture as the setting for God's miraculous intervention.

מַסָּא massa

Hebrew

A weighty utterance or prophetic burden, conveying the gravity and divine authority of the message being delivered.

Cross References

Genesis 18:11-14

Sarah and Abraham were also advanced in years and barren, yet God fulfilled His promise of a child, establishing the biblical pattern of miraculous births that Pastor Slager highlighted as recurring throughout the Old Testament.

Isaiah 40:3

The prophecy of 'a voice crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord' directly connects to John the Baptist's role as the forerunner, complementing the Malachi 4:5 prophecy about the coming Elijah figure.

Psalms 13:1-2

David's cry 'How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?' mirrors Israel's experience during the 400 years of silence between Malachi and Luke, when God's people wondered if He had forgotten His promises.

Habakkuk 2:3

The promise that the vision 'awaits its appointed time... it will surely come; it will not delay' parallels the sermon's emphasis on God fulfilling His promises in His own timing, even when centuries pass.

1 Samuel 1:19-20

Hannah's barrenness and miraculous conception of Samuel—another child set apart for God's service from birth—provides a direct Old Testament parallel to Elizabeth's experience and the pattern of God using impossible circumstances for His purposes.

Further Reading

- **The Coming of the King: The Gospel According to Luke (The Bible Speaks Today)**

by Michael Wilcock

- **Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas**

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton, et al.

- **God Is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas**

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Scripture References

REFERENCE	TYPE	TIME	CONTEXT
Malachi 1:1-2	Read Aloud	5:33	<i>The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Ma...</i>
Malachi 4:5-6	Read Aloud	8:50	<i>"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before...</i>
Luke 1:5-7	Read Aloud	11:11	<i>In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a p...</i>
Matthew 23:1-4	Read Aloud	12:25	<i>Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples...</i>
Luke 1:57-58	Read Aloud	26:16	<i>Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and...</i>
2 Peter 3:8-9	Read Aloud	31:45	<i>But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that w...</i>
Revelation 22:20	Referenced	35:00	<i>He who testifies these things says, "Yes. I come a...</i>
1 Corinthians 11:23-26	Referenced	35:53	<i>For I received from the Lord that which also I del...</i>
John 3:16	Referenced	31:04	<i>For God so loved the world, that he gave his one a...</i>
Matthew 11:14	Referenced	9:16	<i>If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, ...</i>
Matthew 17:12-13	Referenced	9:16	<i>but I tell you that Elijah has come already, and t...</i>
Luke 9:41	Referenced	13:27	<i>Jesus answered, "Faithless and perverse generation...</i>
Luke 1:8-10	Read Aloud	14:34	<i>Now while he was serving as priest before God when...</i>
1 Chronicles 24:5	Referenced	15:33	<i>Thus were they divided impartially by drawing lots...</i>
Luke 1:11-12	Read Aloud	17:04	<i>And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord sta...</i>
Luke 2:8-10	Referenced	17:19	<i>There were shepherds in the same country staying i...</i>
Daniel 8:27	Referenced	17:52	<i>I, Daniel, fainted, and was sick for some days. Th...</i>
Luke 1:13-17	Read Aloud	18:10	<i>But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zech...</i>
Luke 1:18	Read Aloud	23:13	<i>And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know...</i>
Luke 1:19-20	Read Aloud	24:04	<i>And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand...</i>
Numbers 6:24-26	Referenced	25:03	<i>'Yahweh bless you, and keep you. Yahweh make his f...</i>
Luke 1:21-25	Read Aloud	25:13	<i>And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and the...</i>
Luke 1:14	Referenced	26:34	<i>You will have joy and gladness; and many will rejo...</i>
Luke 1:59-63	Read Aloud	27:14	<i>And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the ...</i>
Luke 1:64-66	Read Aloud	30:07	<i>And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongu...</i>
Galatians 5:22-23	Referenced	34:08	<i>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, p...</i>
John 1:14	Referenced	36:37	<i>The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw ...</i>
John 1:29	Referenced	4:16	<i>The next day, he saw Jesus coming to him, and said...</i>

REFERENCE	TYPE	TIME	CONTEXT
Revelation 19:13-16	Referenced	37:18	<i>He is clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood. H...</i>