

When Barrenness Prepared the Way to Life

South Stevens County Times, Pastors Perspective Column

By Pastor Tim White

December 2023

And so, here we are in the last month of 2023. What does December bring to your mind? We expect it to get colder, the nights to get longer, and the snow to arrive before Christmas. Most people enjoy the snow during December because there is something special about a white Christmas. As Andy Williams sings, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” I pray it is so for you and yours this year.

Two of my favorite verses in the biblical account of what we celebrate at Christmas are the last words the Archangel Gabriel says to the Virgin Mary. In Luke chapter 1 verses 28-33, Gabriel says to Mary what every young Jewish girl longed to hear – that she would be blessed among all women of all time because she would forever be known as the mother of the prophesied and long-awaited Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek).

In the next verse, Mary asks the obvious question, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called “the Son of God.” Then, to assure Mary that this will occur, he adds my favorite part of the interchange in verses 36-37:

“Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”

Those words, “...she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month,” stir up faith and hope within my spirit every time I read this account. I can picture the triumphant expression on Gabriel’s face as he drives the point home with these eternal words: “For nothing is impossible with God.” God’s words and His plans will succeed – every time – without fail.

Elizabeth would give birth to the prophesied “Elijah,” who would “prepare the way” for the coming Messiah (Luke 1:16-17), and his name would be John (the Baptist).

Elizabeth and her husband, a priest named Zechariah, were long past child-bearing years. They should be enjoying grandchildren at their age, but no. Family gatherings at the yearly feasts were filled with their relatives and friends’ children and grandchildren, but they attended as just the two of them and returned year after year to an empty house.

In their culture, children were a sign of God’s blessing and favor, but barrenness was considered a “disgrace” (Luke 1:25). Shame and false feelings of guilt would be typical of a woman in her situation. Judging from what they could see, God had forgotten or forsaken them in the area of having an heir to carry on their name. Nothing more could be done. Case closed.

But nothing was farther from the truth in God’s eternal plans and purposes. God had not set them aside; instead, He was setting them up for an even grander work than they could imagine. To their credit, amid the barrenness, they kept following God and blamelessly

observing the commandments of the Lord (Luke 1:6). Serving and worshiping God when life seems to have denied you the desire of your heart demonstrates what trusting in God at all times looks like.

In hindsight, we see that in God's wisdom and foreknowledge, He required barrenness in her life so that she would bring even more glory to God later in life. God saw what everyone considered shameful (being childless) as a perfect thing - a faithful couple who were right where they needed to be so He could fulfill His plan through them. Could there be situations in your life judged as bad when God may be preparing you for His bigger plans?

People will say, "If God is a loving God, then tell me why He allowed this...or why He did not stop that...?" How quick some are to charge God with wrong-doing as if they could see everything from the same perspective He has. Job, for example, lost everything, yet he "refused to accuse God of wrong-doing" (Job 1:22). If you have done that, stop and consider your flawed humanity and Who it is you are pointing your finger at. Perhaps you should reconsider?

Romans 15:4 says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." This account of John the Baptist's parents is similar to many other stories in the Bible. They are all there to teach us and encourage us to endure the "unexplainable" and the "barren places" in our lives because God is always with those who trust Him.

"For nothing is impossible with God." What if we let that last sentence of Gabriel to Mary ring loud and long in our hearts and minds? If you are in a barren place or time of disappointment and confusion, how might your mindset change regarding your current reality if you added those six words at the end of any discussion about things you cannot control or change? And chose to believe it?

I am not talking about denying your current reality or psyching yourself into some fantasy land. I am talking about a choice - to intentionally put your faith in the God who turns barren places into life-giving springs. Choosing to not give in to the discouragement as if you are on your own, but instead, confident that you are in your Heavenly Father's hands, and believing that "In all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." (Rom 8:28).

Faith in God is what you and I must choose. God will not do that for us, but He will show Himself faithful to all who will trust Him even if they dwell in barren places. Do not give up or give in, but "through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope." (Romans 15:4) For nothing - that means nothing - is impossible with God!