

**WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, December 17, 2024**  
**Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN**

**“His Name is JOHN!”**

**READING:** Luke 1:59-64 – On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.

I have a niece who was expecting her second child. Her firstborn was a son who received the name Peyton because his father was a huge fan of Peyton Manning, the football quarterback. So I assumed that with the second child, she would get the privilege of choosing the name, and I was right. They had another son, and the day he was born his parents announced his name: “Quilleran”! The whole family was flummoxed. They had never heard that name before, much less was anyone in the extended family carrying such a name. I believe I was the only one in the family that recognized the source of that name. I had read a mystery book in which the detective who solved the mystery had the name Quilleran. My niece is a librarian, loves books, and that series of mystery books was her favorite one, and she had always thought should she have a son she would name him Quilleran.

I have a nephew who married, and in short order he and his wife were expecting. They kept the sex and name of the child to themselves until it was born. That day was announced to the family that they had a son and his name was “Ottomar”! Now, we had a few old men around my home congregation when I was young who had the name “Otto”, but I had never heard their version before. The whole family was flummoxed and wondered where that name came from. He told us later he was looking at an old plat map of one of his farms and saw that it had once been owned by an “Ottomar”. He liked it, and his wife was also okay with it, thus we have an “Ottomar” in our family tree.

When Elizabeth gave birth to a son, the whole town and all of Zechariah’s family were happy and excited for the old couple. Naturally, when the eighth day of his life came along, they all gathered for his *bris*, or circumcision. It was traditional that on that day the child would receive his name, and the family were of the opinion that since this was a miracle child and the only son, he would be named Junior, Zechariah, Jr. that is. When Elizabeth objects and says he's to be named John, they scoff at her. “Don’t be silly! There’s no one named John in either of your families.” And then they turn to the man of the house. Surely Zechariah will have the last say. To their amazement, he scrawls on the tablet, “His name is John.”

It's obvious that while Zechariah has sat in silence the past nine months, he’s had plenty of time to contemplate what the angel Gabriel had said to him at the Temple that day. He had

doubted those words and questioned their meaning. For his trouble, he had been struck speechless. But he remembered full well that Gabriel had said, "...you are to give him the name John." He wasn't about to make that mistake again. When the family queries him, he is quick to respond with the name John. For his newfound obedience, Zechariah receives his voice once more and he employs it to the praise of his God who has done marvelous things.

The Hebrew rendering of John means "the Lord is gracious." What God was about to do in the sending of his Son was the most gracious, selfless act in the history of the world. John's name was to reflect that grace as he showed himself to be the forerunner of the Messiah. John does indeed become "great in the sight of Lord." Jesus was to say of him, "Of those born of women there is none greater than John." He was the one who went before Christ preparing the way. It was also him who declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." His name carried the weight of his mission.

Parents put a lot of thought and conversation into the choice of their children's names. That is a gift or burden they place upon a child that will follow them to the grave and beyond. Some names have relevance within the family's history. Some names are creatively imagined and invented. Some names are whimsical. And some names honor a hero or sports star. But the name John was given not by parents, but by God himself because he was up to something BIG! And in that BIG THING, God commanded another set of parents to give a name he himself had chosen, "You shall give him the name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Ah, the name above all names! "It sounds like music in my ear, the sweetest name on earth! Oh, how I love Jesus!" Amen.

**PRAYER:**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

1) **ADVENT SERVICES:** Our last mid-week Advent service takes place tomorrow, December 18, at 7:00. A reminder to those affected, Grace on Wednesday will move up supper to 5:15, and classes from 5:45-6:45. Church then follows. Our theme this year is: "Signs of Messiah: Isaiah Speaks". We will look at Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 11: "A Branch". Plan now to join us as we prepare to celebrate our Savior's birth.

2) **GIFTS for KIDS:** we will again be gifting needy families within and outside our congregation with clothes, toys, and other things for Christmas. We can only do this with the money you provide for us. You can mail it to the office or drop it in the offering in an envelope that simply says, "Gifts for Kids". Thank you on behalf of every child we make smile on Christmas morning.

3) **CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES:** 5:00 and 11:00 PM with communion in both. **CHRISTMAS MORNING SERVICE:** 10:00 AM with communion.