

Wednesday 24th June

Luke 1:57-66, 80 The Birth of John the Baptist

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, 'No; he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'None of your relatives has this name.' Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will this child become?'

The name John comes from the Hebrew name *Yochanan*, which means "Yahweh was gracious", as indeed he was with Elizabeth bearing a much desired child in older age. The "Congregation" could not understand why the child was given such a name and not Zechariah after his father. Perhaps those who knew the story would have understood

It is several months since a child was baptised in any Methodist Church, indeed in many churches. It is always a delight to baptise a child, though sometimes the congregations can be hard work.

There are times the names can be hard work too. These days there seems to be a desire to have unique names, or strangely spelt names Elon Musk and Grimes' son is example of both. They had to respell their son's name from "X Æ A-12" to "X Æ A-XII" as numbers are not allowed in the spelling of a name in California (And probably not here too).

One child I baptised in my first circuit was given the names Catherine Elizabeth Beryl Bailey-Coleman. She will now be about 27 years old but I remember her name. It was her grandfather's Bible that I used for many years in leading worship as it was given to me as an Ordination Present some 28 years ago. It is now not in brilliant condition as it was used so much.

The first child I baptised in Circuit ministry was a Kirsty Michelle Williams in whose wedding I shared 3 years ago, 27 years after her baptism another special moment in my life and ministry. I still have the order of service for the baptism and the sermon preached that day.

There are others I can remember but for obvious reasons I am not in touch with many of these children but at each baptism there is the wondering of what will this child achieve? What will their future be like? I may have baptised a child who is now a doctor, a scientist, inventor, actor or teacher. Others will now be of school age and who knows even now what will become of them in years to come and how this time of home schooling has affected them and their parents.

When you were at school what had you hoped to achieve with your life? What were your dreams for your life? How near those dreams have you got? Perhaps the real question we should ask is "How close to God's plan for our life have we got?"

If we were to follow through the life of John the Baptist, those parts recorded in the New Testament, we see there are times in his ministry of great certainty and time of uncertainty and ultimately an unpleasant death. He was called to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah "A Voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." This he did.

"What then will this child become?" The next time you attend a baptism service, whenever that might be, ask that question and pray that it may grow and become strong in spirit – God's spirit.