

Luke: The Nativity

Week 4: Naming Rights

Summary

Think for just a moment about your name. Where did it come from? Who named you? The very sound of your name is so familiar to you that you probably never think about it. Is your name a *family name*? Do you go by a *nick-name*? Does your name have unique spelling? Names matter. You are told from the earliest years in school to put your name at the top of your paper. Names are the beginning of relationship and friendship – you meet and the first thing you want to know is a name.

Every one of you know your name. But do you know who you are? Do you know who God made you to be?

This week in our study of Luke's gospel, we're looking at the story of the birth of John the Baptist – the fulfilment of what Gabriel spoke to Zechariah at the beginning of Luke 1. The text seems to focus on what John would be named or called, but then it ends with a very different question: "What then will this child be?" All of us must answer that question.

Scripture Text: Read Luke 1:57-66

For discussion / reflection:

1. Is there a story behind your name? In your group, take a moment to share your full name – and if there's a story, share that too.
2. Look through Luke 1:57-66 and identify every word or phrase that has to do with the naming of a child?
3. Go back to the beginning of Luke 1 where Gabriel appears to Zechariah. What do we learn about who John is from Gabriel?
4. After John is born, what do we learn about who John is from Zechariah (read 1:76-80).
5. Respond to the following quotes from Craig Barnes.

Regarding an inherited identity

I once asked my grandmother if my granddad was fulfilled as a farmer. She was confused by the question. First I had to explain the concept to her. Finally she shrugged and said, "I

don't know, honey. He was a farmer." That was the first time it hit me that he spent most of his life plowing dirt but never asking himself if this was what he wanted to do with his life. He farmed because he inherited the identity of farmer from the six generations of ancestors who lived on that same acreage. That now seems, well, quaint. We understand the pursuit of fulfillment all too well — it's pretty much our Holy Grail.

Regarding a self-constructed identity

"At commencement ceremonies over the last few decades, we told our graduates to dream their own dreams, do their own thing, work hard, and they could be whatever they wanted to be. What we did not tell them was how they could know who it is that they want to be. We might as well have told the graduates, "Sorry, we have nothing for you. You're on your own."

Regarding a God-given identity

"As our theologians remind us, creation occurred "ex nihilo," or out of nothingness. This means that all things, even the dust with which humanity was created, derive their existence from God. So when we seek a different identity derived from anything other than God, we don't actually become different but only return to the nothingness we were before God created our lives . . . creatures who believed the serpent's lie that their identity could be changed by reaching for something other than what they were given by the Creator."

6. What do you think John Calvin meant when he wrote that knowledge of God and knowledge of self are inseparable?