

*The Gospel According to*

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

<p>NOTHING RECORDED</p>	<p>NOTHING RECORDED</p>	<p>CHAPTER 1, VERSES 57-58</p> <p><b>1:57</b> - Now Elisabeth's full time<sup>1</sup> came that she should be delivered<sup>2</sup>; and she brought forth a son.</p> <p><b>1:58</b> - And her neighbours and her cousins<sup>3</sup> heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy<sup>4</sup> upon her; and they rejoiced<sup>5</sup> with her.</p>	<p>NOTHING RECORDED</p>
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**CHRONOLOGY:** APPROXIMATELY October 11, 5BCE\*

\* The established year for this chapter is based on the year of Jesus' birth, which is highly debated. Below is a list of possible years for Jesus' birth. The chronology of Jesus' life in this book is based on the author's belief that Jesus was born in 4BCE. The most likely years for Jesus' birth are 1BCE, 4BCE and 5BCE. The other years are problematic.

- Year theories:
- 1 BCE - Supported by the Apostle James E. Talmage & Secular Biblical Scholars Pearson and Hug & the creator of Gregorian Calendar: Dionysius Exiguus.
  - 2 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholar Scallinger.
  - 2/3 BCE - Supported by early Christian writers and historians Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Origen, Eusebius and Epiphanius.
  - 3 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Baronius and Paulus.
  - 4 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Bengel, Wieseler & Greswell. **Supported by this Author.**
  - 5 BCE - Supported by the Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, the Apostle J. Rueben Clark, and Secular Biblical Scholars Usher and Petavius.
  - 6 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Strong, Luvin and Clark.
  - 7 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Ideler and Sanclemente.

**LOCATION:** JUDAEA (HEBRON, BETHLEHEM, EIN KAREN OR NEAR WITHIN VICINITY OF JERUSALEM)

**COMMENTARY:** We assume that shortly after Mary departed for her home in Nazareth, Elisabeth went into labor. As the angel Gabriel had promised, a son was born. This chapter makes reference to the celebration that was customary among the Jews when a child is born. Undoubtedly this celebration was amplified by the fact that Elisabeth was stricken with age and was considered barren. The birth of a child to Zacharias and Elisabeth was nothing less than a miracle. The God of Heaven brought about this birth to prepare the way of His Son, who would shortly enter mortality. Family and friends would join the family to celebrate the birth of John the Baptist.

**FOOTNOTES:**

- 1- **full time** - The fact that Elizabeth's "full time came" is an indication that her pregnancy went the full 9+ solar months or a 40 week term. Of course a 9 of our months was very different than 9 Jewish Months. The Jewish Month was based on the Lunar Calendar and alternated between 29 and 30 days. A Jewish pregnancy was just over 10 lunar months.
- 2- **delivered** - There is not much information available on what a Jewish delivery or child birth looked like. Based on ancient documents from neighboring societies, it appears that women gave birth in a standing, kneeling or squatting position (probably a combination of these as the birth progressed). They used brightly painted birthing bricks to stand or kneel on. Some of these bricks would have a cavity allowing a woman to sit on the brick and still pass the baby. There is also evidence of birth-stools or chairs. In the Roman and Egyptian world there were special birthing chairs with a U-shaped hole in the seat and supports for the feet and back, and well-to-do Jewish women in the later biblical period could have used these as well.

A Hebrew woman at the time of Elisabeth and Zacharias, whose time to deliver had arrived, would have been surrounded by women she knew and trusted - her relatives and friends. Hence, the fact that Elisabeth is said to have neighbors and relatives present, probably indicates that they were there to assist with the delivery. The women present for a delivery gathered around their delivering friend, working in shifts to massage her, support her under the arms or wipe her face and body with damp cloths. Most women had seen many other women giving birth, so they she knew what to expect and how to help.

As soon as a baby was born, it was washed by the midwife. She used items that may seem strange to the modern reader: olive oil, salt, warm water, and sometimes diluted wine. Each ingredient had a purpose:

- salt and wine had antiseptic qualities
- the water melted and diluted them
- the oil was soothing to the baby's skin.



Immediately after this cleansing, the baby was wrapped in coarsely woven linen strips. The baby might have appeared wrapped in a partial mummy wrapping. This was normal practice. The strips of cloth (swaddling bands) held the limbs of the baby firmly, though not tightly, giving the baby a sense of security, and confining it as it had been confined in the womb. We do much the same with modern babies when we wrap them firmly in a shawl or a baby blanket. Swaddling bands were believed to promote strong, straight bones as the baby grew.

Babies did not wear diapers or nappies; they 'went' into small clay pots that the mother carried with her. The swaddling clothes, or linen strips, did not cover its lower bottom. Mothers quickly learned to read the signals a baby sent when it was about to excrete, and since it virtually never left its mother's side, this was easier than it would be now. This is still the common practice in many parts of the world.

Jewish Religious Law (According to Jewish law contained in *Kitzur Shulhan Aruch*, Section 107) states that when a woman begins labor, she acquires a different ritual status. (Ritual status in Judaism has nothing to do with cleanliness or being female—both men and women acquire different ritual statuses at various stages of life or in particular circumstances). Once the laboring woman enters this stage, all physical contact between husband and wife stops and he cannot look at her exposed body. Husband and wife have no physical contact until seven days after the birth, if the baby is male, or 14 days if the baby is female. Once the mother stops bleeding, she immerses in a "Mikveh", a ritual bath, after which the couple may resume physical contact. A "mikveh" was a font of water in which baptisms and ceremonial washings took place.

In Temple times (prior to 70CE, when it was destroyed), women waited another 33 days after a male birth and 66 days after a female birth before they underwent the ritual cleansing and resumed normal life. They then brought a sacrificial offering to the temple in Jerusalem (Leviticus 12). Wet nurses were not unusual in Biblical times. Miriam found a wet nurse for baby Moses when he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:7-10), and Rebecca had a wet nurse named Deborah (Genesis 35:8).

On the first Sabbath after a Jewish child is born, the infant's father is called forward at the synagogue to recite the "alayah" and ask blessings for the health of mother and child. If the child is a girl, she is named at this time. Boys will be named on the eighth day after birth, as part of the rite of circumcision.

Jewish children living outside of Israel are traditionally given a Hebrew name for use in religious rituals, such as the calling up to the aliyah (benedictions) and the ketubah (marriage contract), and a secular name for purposes of civil birth records and daily use.

The Hebrew name takes the form of "[child's name] bar [father's name]" for boys, or "[child's name] bat [father's name]" for girls. The name itself has no religious significance, and while it is often a Hebrew or Yiddish name, it can be a name from any language or culture. Ashkenazi Jews traditionally name their children after a recently deceased relative.

- 3- **cousins** - The term "cousins" comes from the Greek word "συγγενής" or "syngenes" which actually translates as kin or related by blood. In a wider sense, it can take on the idea of countrymen. The verse may read neighbors and family or neighbors and countrymen. This term causes much confusion to modern readers who want to limit its use to biological cousins.
- 4- **Great Mercy** - See footnote #45 in Chapter 5. Great Mercy is the compassionate treatment of a person greater than what is deserved or possible by mortal means. Great Mercy is made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Our Heavenly Father knows our weaknesses and sins. He shows mercy when He forgives us of our sins and helps us return to dwell in His presence. Great Mercy is extended by God in other ways. He provides great mercy when he intervenes in our mortal struggles. All of this is done through God's Son, Jesus Christ. In spite of our earthly struggles, the Lord promises us, **"For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee."** (3rd Nephi 22:7).
- 5- **rejoice** - The term "rejoice" comes from the Greek word "συγχαίρω" or "sygchairo" meaning "to take part in another's joy", "congratulate", or "to rejoice together". The Jews typically rejoice through the singing of songs, reciting scriptures, and issuing prayers. They gathered with friends and neighbors to share their joy. The Jews were a social society, and often prepared meals as part of their celebrations. One might say that the Jews looked for opportunity to celebrate. The Lord's people should recognize that there is much to celebrate. **"When one knows the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is cause to rejoice. The words joy and rejoice appear through the scriptures repetitively....We have cause to rejoice and we do rejoice, even celebrate."** (General Conference, "The Mystery of Life", Boyd K. Packard, October 1983). In Modern Scripture the Lord teaches, **"Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours ... and the riches of eternity."** (Doctrine & Covenants 78:18).

This might bring up an interesting question. Zacharias was dumb and mute. This had not been lifted at this point. How then could Zacharias rejoice? One might justify a lack of celebration, since there were obvious trials present. Elder Maxwell taught, **"Therefore, given the aforementioned grand and overarching reasons to rejoice, can we not 'be of good cheer' in spite of stress and circumstance? President Brigham Young said of a geographical destination, 'This is the place.' Of God's plan of salvation, with its developmental destination, it can be said, 'This is the process'! President Young, who knew something about trial and tribulation but also of man's high destiny, said that the Lord lets us pass through these experiences that we might become true friends of God. By developing our individual capacities, wisely exercising our agency, and trusting God—including when we feel forsaken and alone—then we can, said President Young, learn to be 'righteous in the dark.'** (Secretary's Journal, 28 Jan. 1857.) The gospel glow we see radiating from some—amid dark difficulties—comes from illuminated individuals who are "of good cheer"! To be cheerful when others are in despair, to keep the faith when others falter, to be true even when we feel forsaken—all of these are deeply desired outcomes during the deliberate, divine tutorials which God gives to us—because He loves us. (See *Mosiah 3:19*.) These learning experiences must not be misread as divine indifference. Instead, such tutorials are a part of the divine unfolding." (General Conference, "Be of Good Cheer", Neal A. Maxwell, October 1982) We have reason to rejoice, as the Lord's blessings are always abundant. Even so, we often have to look for the real substance of God's blessings. When we see the true work of our Father in Heaven, it is glorious. **"In our striving to be prepared, therefore, let us be careful to rely on parents, priesthood, and principles—and on scriptures, and temples, and leaders who lead—to see us through. Let us not mistake program scaffolding for substance."** (General Conference, "Be of Good Cheer", Neal A. Maxwell, October 1982).

