

Joy in the Womb
Luke 1:24-45

We live in an age that is quite conflicted and hypocritical when it comes to the issue of babies.
Al Mohler – 1-14-19

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the recent cover of Time magazine has the headline, “The future of babies, a special report”
It is but one of recent articles that show how we are pressing the boundaries of reproductive technology

Mohler...

But we need to note that we are a very strange society. We're a society that puts this kind of effort into reproduction, this kind of focus, even in this cover story in TIME Magazine, on babies, and no one is ashamed in this article to use the word baby. ...

But at the same time, we are a society that aborts between 600,000 and 800,000 unborn human beings per year. And we're a society that calls a baby a baby when the baby is wanted as a baby and calls the baby something else when the baby is, for one reason or another, not so wanted.

This leads to an intellectual dissonance and whiplash for a society that plays so fast and loose with the foundational issue of life. As believers in Jesus Christ, who came into this world as a baby, we look to God’s Word to get our bearings on this issue.

We’re not so far removed from Christmas that we can’t look at a text that goes along with the announcement of the birth of Jesus. Today we’ll look at some overlooked aspects of this text.

Luke 1:24-45 is typically associated with the whole pre-Christmas narrative. Today we want to look at it in the context of the Sanctity of Life.

I had planned on beginning the series on Hebrews but thought it best to lean in on this topic today. If you’re a visitor, or a member, you may think “Here goes the preacher getting into politics. I hate it when they do that.”

Just to be fair, I should point out that the issues of life, the sanctity of life, the protection of the unborn, and care for those expecting a child have been religious, moral, social, and cultural issues long before they were political issues. And even when they were politicized to some degree, they were still moral and religious issues.

There are areas where religious, moral, and political concerns overlap. When that happens, they still need to be addressed even when there are political implications.

As a local congregation and as a denomination, we are not prone to jump into “political” discussions unless they have clear biblical moral implications. For better or for worse it may need to happen more often because more and more moral issues are being politicized.

One area that is foundational in terms of morals and ethics is that of the Sanctity of Life. Highlands and the PCA have always taken a public stand on the moral implications of abortion because of the deep biblical issues involved.

Until recently, there was a consistent voice in the Christian church that such killing is wrong. Going back to the earliest sources for Christian thinking outside the New Testament (the beginning of the second century), the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas both forbid abortions.

You shall do no murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not corrupt boys, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal, you shall not deal in magic, you shall do no sorcery, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when born. (Didache 2:2; cf. Epistle of Barnabas 19:5)

Why did the early church, and all succeeding generations of Christians, come to this conclusion—that it is forbidden to take the life of the unborn?

Because **when a human life comes into existence something special has happened—a new life created in the image of God is formed to live forever.**

As believers we recognize that the Bible says God has sovereign rights over birth and death. When Job's children were killed by a wind that destroyed their house, Job fell on his face and worshipped God and said, "**The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord**" (Job 1:21). The Lord gave—they were conceived and born by God's act—that's his prerogative. The Lord took—that's his prerogative. Not ours. So the church has always shrunk back from intruding on the rights of God. He gives; he takes. Birth and death are his to grant, not ours.

Scripture shows us the profound conviction that what is happening in the womb is God's unique and sacred work in forming a human life. **Psalm 139:13 puts this in terms of God's very hands-on work in the womb: "You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."** This is God's doing. Not ours. It is his to make. And his to end. (See also Job 31:13–15.)

But the text that I wanted to focus on today is a glimpse into the womb that is instructive for us today. Let's look at Luke 1. The situation is that Elizabeth and Mary are both given a child in the womb. Both pregnancies are out of the ordinary. Elizabeth because she is too old, and she had always been barren. She becomes pregnant with John the Baptist. And Mary, because she is a young virgin. But the Holy Spirit comes upon her, and she becomes pregnant with Jesus, the Son of God.

LUKE 1

24After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, **25**"This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me*, to take away my disgrace among men."

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, **27**to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. ...

36And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

...**39**Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, **40**and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. **41**When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. **42**And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! **43**And how has it *happened* to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? **44**For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. **45**And blessed *is* she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Now, of course, none of this was written with abortion in mind. That doesn't mean that the passage doesn't have clear implications for the issue of abortion. This text gives us some insights into how we in our day can approach the topic

Notice two things.

1. The Word Baby

First, the word baby in verses 41 and 44. Verse 41: "And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb." Verse 44: "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

That word baby is not a specialized word for the unborn. It is the usual Greek word for "baby". Here in Luke 1, it refers to John the Baptist in the womb. In Luke 2, it refers to Jesus in the manger. Luke 2:16: "And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." This is exactly the same word for baby.

What the Christian church has understood and agreed on for most of its history is seen right here: what the persons Jesus and John were outside the womb they were already inside the womb.
John Piper

Jesus was the God-man in Mary's womb. When the Holy Spirit (according to Luke 1:35) caused Mary to be pregnant, she was not pregnant with anything less than the Son of God. The baby inside was the same as the baby outside.

Those involved in this story and those who read it for centuries knew then what we today can confirm by science – "that's a baby in the womb."

People understood that it was a baby when it exited the womb because it was a baby inside the womb.

There was no sleight of hand in the birth process that changed the essential DNA structure or composition of the life inside the womb into some new form of being – a baby – when it exited the womb.

EX: the magician who puts certain things in a hat or a box, waves a wand and out comes something totally other. Inanimate objects turn into a rabbit or a dove, etc.

If you listen to the language of some today they say or imply that the birth process somehow creates a child or a baby, BUT just a few minutes, hours, days, weeks, or months prior to that it is something else.

Today **science has made the biblical understanding easier to believe, not harder.** Ultrasound technology has given a clear window on the development in the womb and it shows the unborn at eight weeks sucking his thumb, recoiling from pricking, responding to sound. All the organs are present, the brain is functioning, the heart is pumping, the liver is making blood cells, the kidneys are cleaning fluids, and there is a fingerprint. Yet virtually all abortions happen later in the pregnancy than this date.

Those who would position themselves as the "intelligent ones and culturally relevant" ones find themselves in the contradictory positions I referred to earlier in the Al Mohler report. On the one hand we are seeking to foster the creation of life via as many means as possible while at the same time promoting the abortion option.

2. The Baby in the womb is treated as a Person

The second thing to notice here in Luke 1 is the way the baby in Elizabeth's womb responded to Mary who was carrying the Son of God. Verse 41: "When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the

baby leaped in her womb.” Then in verse 44, Elizabeth interprets that leap like this: “Behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”

And Luke says that Elizabeth said this because she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Verses 41–42: “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed . . .” In other words, the Holy Spirit prompted her to say that this leap of the baby in her womb was a leap of joy.

To increase the significance of that leap even more, consider what an angel said to Elizabeth’s husband Zacharias before his son was conceived. In **Luke 1:14–15**, the angel said, “**And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.**” So that leap is not only a leap of joy but a leap of Holy-Spirit-inspired joy.

Don’t let this slip past us because we think of Luke 1-2 in terms of the Christmas story only. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb.

“I was born a Christian” ... I’ve heard that from folks over the years. Typically what they mean is that they were born into a Christian home and grew up always believing. That’s a great blessing, but unless they have some insight into the work of the spirit on their hearts prior to birth it probably a stretch to say they were “born a Christian.”

The only two people I can say that about with biblical certainty are Jesus and John the Baptist. (I won’t include my friend from college, Bob Christian, who loved to say, “I was born a Christian”.

What shall we make of this reference to John being filled with the Spirit from the womb?
In the Bible, only persons are filled with the Spirit. Not animals, not a tissue mass, not inanimate objects – only people made in the image of God.

What Luke is doing, in this Holy Spirit inspired text, is treating this child in the womb as a person. He uses the word baby which he later uses for Jesus in the manger. He uses the word joy, which is what humans feel. He uses the phrase “filled with the Spirit” which is what God does to persons. He simply assumes he is dealing with a human person in the womb.

And therefore, so should we.

With that in mind we can do several things:

- Pray for a growing awareness in our culture of the baby in the womb.
- We can give to support ministries that help women in need.
- We can pray for those who grieve over past abortions that they would know the abundant grace and forgiveness of Christ.

The announcement of the birth of Jesus was GOOD NEWS when the angels came to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. It is good news today for all of us as well.

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