

The Christmas Questions

What Will This Child Become?

Luke 1:57-66

Grace Church, the congregation I served before I came to LaPorte, had a preschool. This was a very fun and full of life ministry of the church. I took part in the Preschool. We had chapel every month, which was a wonderful time for me to enjoy the children and learn from their ingenuity. Kids, in the preschool phase, are very witty.

I really enjoyed the activities we did with the children and getting to know their families. Around this time of the year, we had a Christmas program. We also had a Spring Program, Grandparents Day, and a Thanksgiving Feast. We celebrated a lot. Yet, my favorite event was Graduation Day.

Every year, we had a graduation ceremony for the preschoolers who were moving on to kindergarten. The kids put on their caps and gowns. We handed out diplomas. I usually did the “commencement speech.” However, my favorite part of the whole ceremony was when the children answered the question: *What are you going to be when you grow up?*

That’s a question that parents, family members, friends, and teachers ask as they see their children grow. ***What is this child going to be?*** My wife and I ask this question from time to time with anticipation and a sense of joy that is hard to describe.

I remember one specific graduation ceremony. The kids were hilarious. So, the question was asked and the children had to say what they were going to be as adults. I heard all kinds of answers. The responses ranged from a doctor, to a zoo-keeper, to a nurse, to a pony, to a fairy. These kids were really creative.

I remember one of my children saying that he wanted to be a police officer. When he said it, everything came together for me. It was like when you are watching a movie and they give you just a tiny piece of information that makes you understand the whole plot. That's what happened to me that day. I understood why my child polices his brothers all day long and gives me a report every two minutes. He is living up to his call at a very young age.

I've never seen that before. At that age, I didn't have such a strong sense of purpose in my life. When I was 5, I wanted to be a horse owner. Later, I wanted to be a pilot, and, then a baseball player. I never imagined I was to become a preacher and serve a church in Elyria, OH. Nevertheless, I am grateful for what I am doing.

What is this child going to be? That's one of the questions that is presented to us in Luke's version of the birth narrative. As we continue to ponder on *The Questions of Christmas*, we encounter the question that most people throughout the hill country of Judea were asking. Here is how the Bible tells the story.

It was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."⁶¹ They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John."⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.⁶⁵ All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these

*things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “**What then is this child going to be?**” For the Lord’s hand was with him.*

Luke 1:57-66 NIV

People had to ask the question. Not only did these neighbors witness Elizabeth’s out-of-season pregnancy. They also experienced their preacher, Zechariah’s, unexpected silence. God for sure was at work, but the people were a little confused.

Not naming the little one after his dad added to the confusion of the people. Everyone assumed the couple would name their son Zechariah. It was the common practice to name the first born after his father. However, you know what they say about assuming. Everyone assumed wrong.

So, the people heard it from Elizabeth first. Then, they saw from Zechariah’s hand writing that the little one’s name was to be John, which means “**God is gracious.**” The family was not following the tradition. The crowd was struck with amazement and confusion.

Actually, these two emotions, amazement and confusion, are very common responses in the Christmas narrative. So far, we have seen how Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth responded in amazement and confusion. And the people of Judea reacted in a similar matter. I imagined that, with amazement and confusion, everyone asked the question of the day: *“**What then is this child going to be?**”*

I know this is a question we ask not only as we watch our children grow up. The question we are contemplating this morning is a question that adults also ask themselves. When we looked at our unfinished lives, our unrealized futures, we too ask the question: What will I become?

Did people imagine that John was to become a weirdo? As the story unfolds, we learn that John the Baptist became a very interesting character. For some people, he was a very strange individual whose dress code was a little extravagant and whose eating habits were a little funny. However, Jesus said that **among mortals there was no one greater than John (Luke 7:28)**.

Looking in retrospect, we can see the kind of person John was. During his ministry, John attracted a great number of people. Even Jesus came to be baptized by John. After Jesus' baptism, the crowds left John to follow Jesus. John was never angry, bitter or jealous; rather, he said, "*He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less*" (**John 3:30 NLT**). From John's answer, I learned that he never stopped becoming. This is also true for all of us.

What will you be? What will I be? That is the fourth question the Nativity story presents to us. It is, of course, a question we ask at baby showers, or when we hold a newborn daughter, or niece, or grandson. But it is not only a question to ponder around a birth. It is, in fact, a question to ask over the course of our lives.

We are constantly becoming. We are constantly in process. That is true because the human condition is one of change and changeability— but it is particularly true of life with God. Friendship with God is never static. God is always offering us the invitation to become more like him: to become more merciful, more loving, more generous. God is always offering us the invitation to become more like those saints and heroes of the faith who have gone before us: more prayerful, more committed to people at the margins, more attentive to the flickers and surprising manifestations of God in our midst.

And so this fourth question of Advent— which appears at first blush to be just a question of the nativity— is really a question for the whole of our lives: who will we become? Will we accept the invitation from God to become a clearer reflection of Jesus, to become less and less so that He can become greater and greater in us? To achieve your God-given potential? That's a decision you need to make.

This is the word of God for the people of God...