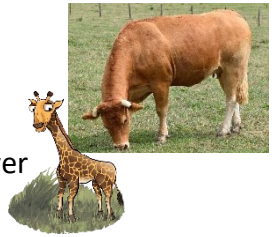




Do you think that we live in a natural world? Wrong! The world that we live in is very much a supernatural world. Regardless of whether you are a Christian, of any other faith or maybe do not confess to belonging to any particular faith, every one of us lives in a world that is very much supernatural. When we wake up in the morning we expect that it is going to be daylight, but we would be extremely surprised if it remained dark all day instead! It is God's supernatural creation that gives us day and night and is something that we have no control over whatsoever.

What about vegetables, flowers, plants and trees? We would definitely consider them to be part of our natural world, but how 'natural' are they? Despite very clever things being performed in laboratories, it is only God who can supernaturally put that spark of life into things. How marvellous is the order of creation of life in animals, birds and fish. Have you noticed that a cow does not give birth to a little giraffe or a blackbird have baby tadpoles? It sounds a silly question to ask I know, but we can take so many things for granted and forget how life is given supernaturally and can only come from God.



I would suppose that Christmas is a time when we may focus on the supernatural because of the number of events that occurred at the time of the birth of Jesus or leading up to that time. Although the exact month of His birth is unknown, it is good that there is a time of the year when we particularly focus on it.



I have been thinking about the birth of John the Baptist. The encounter of his father Zechariah and the angel is absolutely loaded with the supernatural. **(Luke Chapter 1)** Here are some of the things that are included:-

** Zechariah, a priest, was doing his most unusual shift in the temple, keeping the incense burning on the altar, with a large crowd assembled and praying outside. When an angel appeared so unexpectedly, Zechariah was surprised and afraid. I have been wondering why in almost every incident of the appearance of angels recorded in the Bible, the people were frightened. Obviously the sudden appearance of an angel would be startling, but I would say that it was more than that; people would be suddenly faced with the supernatural over which they had no control. In addition to this, I would also think that being in the presence of an angel, sent by God Himself, would cause them to be very much aware of their own sinfulness and imperfections.



** Both Zechariah and his wife were past the age when Elizabeth could naturally have a child. At that time and in that culture not to have children was generally considered that it was because they were out of favour with God and it would have affected them socially. In this instance though, it is recorded that both Zechariah and Elizabeth lived a holy life. The angel said, **'Your prayer has been heard.'** In the original language what the angel said implied that Zechariah had actually now stopped praying about having a child, so this showed that the angel was aware of this.

** Elizabeth was going to have a son. Against all of the natural odds Elizabeth was going to conceive supernaturally.

**** JOHN.** Zechariah was told the name that was to be given to the child. John means, 'The Lord is gracious.' Normally the first son would have been named after his father, so Zechariah was being told that he had to break with tradition.

****** The angel then foretold what sort of person John was going to be. He was going to bring a lot of joy and happiness, not only to his parents, but also to many other people because he was going to be great in God's sight. He would abstain from all alcoholic drinks, making what was known as a 'Nazarite vow.' More than that, he was going to be a special person filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth.

****** John would be used by God to bring many people back into a relationship with Himself.

****** Then came the real 'punch line'. He was to make people ready for the coming of the Lord. How about that! Remember that at this time Jesus had not even been born as a human being on earth, neither had Mary yet been told about His birth. The prophecy of *Isaiah 40: 3 – 5*, given about 750 years previously, about someone living in the wilderness and then preparing people ready for the coming of the Lord, was going to be fulfilled. It was all part of God's perfect unfolding plan.

****** Poor Zechariah. Whatever was he to make of all of this. I think that at this point I would have told the angel to clear off! First an angel, then the promise of a son, a break with tradition about his name, what sort of person he was going to be, and now, to crown it all, one who was going to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. We are fortunate to know the end of the story but Zechariah was not in that same position. What a supernatural encounter!

Zechariah's thoughts are still focussed on the miracle of the promised arrival of a son and he questions what the angel had said. The angel confirms that he is Gabriel and that he has been sent by God to tell him the good news. This is then followed by yet another supernatural act and Zechariah becomes dumb because of his unbelief. When Elizabeth knew that she had conceived she isolated herself for 5 months. She said that the Lord had now taken away her shame. When he was born all her neighbours and relations were so pleased for her.



John was taken to the temple as normal, 8 days after his birth. Much to the puzzlement of the family, Elizabeth said that he was to be named 'John'. It would appear that Zechariah became deaf as well as dumb because we read that the people 'gestured' to him asking what the child was to be named. He showed them that he wanted writing material and he wrote, '**His name is John.**' As soon as he had written that he was able to speak, just as the angel had predicted.

John was about 30 years old when he came out of the wilderness and began his public ministry. A life totally given to inviting people to turn to God and to be prepared for Jesus the Messiah and His ministry. John made it quite clear that he was the forerunner of what Jesus would accomplish. He was a 'nobody' pointing to Jesus who was 'THE SOMEBODY', the Messiah, our Saviour and the only one who is able to make a way to Heaven for each one of us.