

Our Mission:

To share Christ with the world
and grow disciples for Jesus



Loving God and Loving Neighbor as Ourselves

Background:

Luke is very specific in his desire to give an orderly account of Jesus. The scripture quoted is from Isaiah and it describes Israel's return from exile. Without a doubt Luke's audience was attuned to this obvious reference highlighting a ministry of restoration. Please note, however, that John is not leading a religious revival. To the contrary, just as the prophets of old, there are ethical implications for those who wish to be in harmony with God. Indeed, this baptism of John's is an acknowledgment of our rebellious choices and a chance to redeem the future.

Theology Connection:

We want to remember that the baptism of John is not what we practice in the church. His was a baptism for the repentance of sins. Ours is a baptism that acknowledges sin as rebellion but celebrates the gifting of the Holy Spirit. That is why we Lutherans are comfortable with baptizing infants. Baptism is not our chance to say we are sorry and make amends, but God's opportunity to seal his claim upon us as his sons and daughters.

Application:

Luther would remind us that 'daily we die to our sinful nature.' In other words, we cannot save ourselves from our sin. Yet, 'daily we are reborn in the promise of our baptism.' Baptism is more than an event, but it is a means of orientation. How do I see myself? How do I see this world and the myriad relationships I cherish? In baptism we are invited to see ourselves as children of God who have already been forgiven. Doesn't that provide a unique vantage point for our interaction with others?

The Text: Luke 3: 1-22

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.⁶ And all people will see God's salvation."

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.¹¹ John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"¹³ "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done,²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

ADULT

John the Baptist is pointing toward someone else, Jesus. He sees himself as a transitional character, an advance man preparing the way. We are in a transitional period in our lives, not only ending one year and beginning another, but perhaps with a vaccine witnessing the beginning of the end in our war with Covid-19. Are there lessons learned from the past 12 months that you wish not to lose?

Have you come to appreciate your faith in new ways during this pandemic?

YOUTH

Please read Luke 3:1-22

For me, this text is about preparation. Without preparation, we may not receive the full benefits of what is coming. How much more fulfilling is something when we are prepared, allowing the excitement to build, and preparing one's mind and heart! Life-changing events may also require a re-organization of priorities. Of course, that requires much more preparation, as people re-configure what really matters in their lives and what should become like "chaff" that a good fire will burn away.

We are in the time of advent where we are preparing for Jesus. What are things you can do to prepare for Jesus? Let us pray: Dear God, Please, guide us and help us prepare during this season of advent. Please keep us safe, healthy, happy, and humble. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHILDREN'S

When Jesus was 30 years old, the time came for Him to do God's special work. Jesus left His hometown of Nazareth to begin His preaching ministry. The first place that Jesus went was to the Jordan River where His cousin, John, was preaching. Jesus knew that John was telling people that they needed to repent of their sins. They needed to have soft hearts towards God. John the Baptist was baptizing people because they were sorry for the bad things they had done. John was shocked when Jesus came to him and wanted to be baptized. How could this be? Jesus never did any bad things, so why should He be baptized? John said to Jesus, "I should not baptize You, you should baptize me instead!" But Jesus insisted that John baptize Him. So, John took Jesus down into the Jordan River and baptized Him. Something very special happened after Jesus was baptized. The clouds began to move apart, and the sky opened. The Holy Spirit came down from heaven like a dove and landed on Jesus. The voice of God said, "This is my Son and I love Him. I am very pleased with him."

1. How do you think John felt when Jesus wanted to be baptized by him?

Remember:

Obedying God is not just about following the commandments, it is also about doing what is right!

Pray:

Dear God,

Thank You for showing us how to live in a way that is pleasing to You!v

Amen!