

Luke 3:1-22

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the **WILDERNESS**. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the **WILDERNESS**:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill
shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

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 Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What, then, should we do?” ¹¹ In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³ He said to them,

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Luke :: is one of the four gospels. Only in two (Luke and Matthew) is the story of the birth of Jesus told in detail. Luke’s gospel is written according to tradition by Luke, a disciple-intern of the apostle Paul. Our reading today is a story told also by Mark and Matthew.

WILDERNESS:: In both Hebrew and Greek the word used here can be translated as either “wilderness” (as in wild lands) or “desert.” Remember they lived in the dry near east.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Testament the Wilderness is spoken of as a barren, desolate place to which the spiritual went seeking God’s presence and voice. It’s an invitation to us today to explore our own “wilderness times” and to examine where and how God is present even in them.

baptism:: βάπτισμα pronounced /baptisma/ Definition: indicates submerging (dipping, immersion, drowning, or overwhelming); to be βάπτισμα is (the result of) a dipping or sinking. In the ancient world this could apply to materials things (like a plate, or bowl), or living creatures. It came to mean generally: the rite or ceremony of baptism.

repentance:: μετάνοια pronounced /metanoia/ meaning a change of mind, or a change in the inner human, repentance. It comes from the word μετανοέω (from /μετά, "changed after being with" and /νοέω, "think") – properly, "think differently after," "after a change of mind"; to repent (literally, "think differently afterwards"). It's often related to the notion of changing direction, or making a U-turn.

The voice of one crying out in the **WILDERNESS** :: this is a quote from Isaiah 40:1-4 – a proclamation of preparation. The people of Israel are to prepare for return from exile and revelation of God’s glory to all people (even non-Jews). In using this passage, Luke is telling us that, likewise, the people of John’s tie are to prepare for return from their exilelike existence of failure to live a moral life (as will be shown in vv. 10-14) and be ready to share with “all flesh” in the universal “salvation of God.” (v.6). (taken

from Feasting on the Gospels, Luke Vol

Because of his preaching, and this message of repentance,

“Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. 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 granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, *the heaven was opened*,²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged, enraged, or surprised you in the text?
- Luke tells us that Jesus is the source of God’s joy. By extension faith says that we are a source of God’s joy. How do you react to that? How do you find it hard to believe?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, – to act, speak, be, or change, through this scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Because of his preaching, and this message of repentance, John was associated with Elijah who was thought (according to the Hebrew Scriptures) to be J promised to return before the Messiah, and prepare the way of the Messiah. Often quoted is Malachi 4:5-6. [God speaking] ⁵ See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.”

fruits worthy of *repentance*: :: It’s not immediately clear what John means by this exactly. He does oppose the fruits of repentance to any claim of Abraham as father; a racial or cultural sort of superiority that would excuse one from having to live a moral life; or from any comparison to the Gentiles (those not descended from Abraham).

Jesus also had been baptized:: Curiously here Jesus is portrayed as being among the people, in the crowd; whereas in the baptism story in Mark 1:9-11 and Matthew 3:13-17 Jesus is alone.

the heaven was opened :: that is there was no longer any separation from the space/place where God resides/is (heaven) and isn’t – or where humanity is (earth). This is a prophetic expression of divine revelation, language used throughout the prophets such as in Ezekiel 1:1 “In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the River Chebar, *the heavens were opened*, and I saw visions of God.” and in Isaiah 64:1 “¹O that you would *tear open the heavens* and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence.”

a voice came from heaven :: The only other time where a voice comes from heaven is at the transfiguration in Luke 9:28-36 where God again says that Jesus is his Son, the Christ/Messiah. “²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying,.. a cloud came and overshadowed them,.. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”