

## Sunday Lesson – Jan 10, 2021

**GOSPEL: Luke 3: 1-22**

### ***Jesus' Baptism***

#### **Background**

“Apart from Jesus Christ, John the Baptist is probably the most theologically significant figure in the Gospels. John is clearly a pivotal figure in the salvation history of God. Although his formative years were lived in obscurity in the desert, his public ministry ended nearly four hundred years of prophetic silence. John was that voice crying in the wilderness preparing the way for the coming Messiah (Isa 40:3; Matt 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:3-6). In this sense his message and ministry marked the culmination of the law and the prophets, but heralded the inbreaking of the kingdom of God (Matt 11:12; Luke 16:16). So John was truly a transitional figure, forming the link between the Old and New Testaments. He spans the ages with one foot firmly planted in the Old Testament and the other squarely placed in the New.” *(Excerpts from biblestudytools.com/dictionary/john-the-baptist/)*

#### **Insight**

“While Luke gives less attention to John’s garb or diet than Matthew or Mark, he nevertheless also sees him as a — and perhaps as the last and culminating — representative of the Old Testament prophets. He was of priestly lineage on both sides of his family (1:5), is named by the angel Gabriel as having the spirit and power of Elijah (1:17), and fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah (3:4-6). Similarly, John, moved by the word of God, plays two characteristically prophetic roles: (1) He calls for repentance and, indeed, proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and (2) he also precedes, prepares the way for, and foretells the coming of the Messiah, the one who is the salvation of Israel.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries)*



### **Gospel Reading**

”In the fifteenth year of the rule of Caesar Tiberius—it was while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; Herod, ruler of Galilee; his brother Philip, ruler of Iturea and Trachonitis; Lysanias, ruler of Abilene; during the Chief-Priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—John, Zachariah’s son, out in the desert at the time, received a message from God. He went all through the country around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of life-change leading to forgiveness of sins, as described in the words of Isaiah the prophet:

Thunder in the desert!

“Prepare God’s arrival!

Make the road smooth and straight!

Every ditch will be filled in,

Every bump smoothed out,

The detours straightened out,

All the ruts paved over.

Everyone will be there to see

The parade of God’s salvation.”

When crowds of people came out for baptism because it was the popular thing to do, John exploded: “Brood of snakes! What do you think you’re doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to deflect God’s judgment? It’s your *life* that must change, not your skin. And don’t think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as ‘father.’ Being a child of Abraham is neither here nor there—children of Abraham are a dime a dozen. God can make children from stones if he wants. What counts is your life. Is it green and blossoming? Because if it’s deadwood, it goes on the fire.” The crowd asked him, “Then what are we supposed to do?” “If you have two coats, give one away,” he said. “Do the same with your food.” Tax men also came to be baptized and said, “Teacher, what should we do?” He told them, “No more extortion—collect only what is required by law.” Soldiers asked

him, “And what should we do?” He told them, “No shakedowns, no blackmail—and be content with your rations.” The interest of the people by now was building. They were all beginning to wonder, “Could this John be the Messiah?” But John intervened: “I’m baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.” There was a lot more of this—words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them. The Message! But Herod, the ruler, stung by John’s rebuke in the matter of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, capped his long string of evil deeds with this outrage: He put John in jail. After all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized. As he was praying, the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit, like a dove descending, came down on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.” *The Message*

### What It Could Mean?

“For Luke, God’s announcement of Jesus’ identity (as “God’s son”) was the significant event of the baptism, the identity the angel had claimed earlier (Luke 1:35). Here was the first time God had mentioned it directly. By the time of Jesus’ baptism, John’s voice in the wilderness (3:4) was replaced by a heavenly voice (3:22) and John’s body was replaced by the Spirit’s “body” in the form of a dove. John’s absence from the baptism scene emphasizes the Spirit’s “baptism” or empowerment of Jesus and God’s acknowledgement of Jesus’ identity as God’s Son (3:21-22).

As Isaiah announces, the coming Messiah will reveal the “salvation of God” (Luke 3:6). Many contemporary readers of the Gospel narratives usually associate the story of “salvation”

with the coming and dying of Jesus. This was clearly one of Luke’s points but the language of “salvation” also means more for first century Jews when Simeon saw God’s “salvation” in the baby Jesus (2:30). For ancient Jews, Zechariah’s words are representative: “(God) has raised up a mighty savior for us ... that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us” (1:69, 71). The Messiah’s salvation would affect their political realities so that their religious ones would also be unhindered, “that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear” (1:74).

Jesus’ public mission initiates a new stage in God’s plan of dealing with humankind. John’s preparatory work is the work of all, involving signs and symbols like baptism that mark the moments of repentance and turning to God. Repentance implies a preparation of one’s heart, mind, and entire attitude that God desires to engage God’s creation. Then, the Spirit will also prepare the way of the Lord!” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org Narrative Lectionary commentaries from wy by Emerson Powery*)

### Readings for Further Study

- [John 1: 19-28](#) *John the Baptist*
- [John 1: 20-34/Mark 1:9/Matthew 3: 11-15](#) *Jesus’ Baptism*

### Thought for the Day

“The Bible was not given for our information, but our transformation” ~ *D.L. Moody*

### A Prayer

Heavenly Father, with joy and awe we praise you for claiming us as your sons and daughters, and for pouring your Holy Spirit upon us. Help us to prepare this earth for your glory, and shine your light on all your faithful children, for the sake of the one whose birth and baptism brought renewal and transformation to this world, Jesus Christ. **Amen**