

ST JOSEPH THE WORKER
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



Luke 3

The Preaching of John the Baptist.

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,

2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.

3 He went throughout [the] whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,

4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one crying out in the desert:

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

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

The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth,

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

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

8 Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

9 Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

[3:1] Tiberius Caesar: Tiberius succeeded Augustus as emperor in A.D. 14 and reigned until A.D. 37. The fifteenth year of his reign, depending on the method of calculating his first regnal year, would have fallen between A.D. 27 and 29. **Pontius Pilate: prefect of Judea** from A.D. 26 to 36. The Jewish historian Josephus describes him as a **greedy and ruthless** prefect who had little regard for the local Jewish population and their religious practices (see Lk 13:1). Herod: i.e., Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. He ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. His official title **tetrarch means literally, “ruler of a quarter,”** but came to designate any subordinate prince.

Philip: also, a son of Herod the Great, tetrarch of the territory to the north and east of the Sea of Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 34. Only two small areas of this territory are mentioned by Luke. Lysanias: nothing is known about this Lysanias who is said here to have been tetrarch of Abilene, a territory northwest of Damascus.

[3:2] During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas: after situating the call of John the Baptist in terms of the civil rulers of the period, Luke now mentions the religious leadership of Palestine. **Annas had been high priest A.D. 6–15. After being [deposed] by the Romans in A.D. 15** he was succeeded by various members of his family and eventually by his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was high priest A.D. 18–36. Luke refers to Annas as high priest at this time (but see Jn 18:13, 19), possibly because of the continuing influence of Annas or because the title continued to be used for the ex-high priest. The word of God came to John: Luke is alone among the New Testament writers in associating the preaching of John with a call from God. Luke is thereby identifying John with the prophets whose ministries began with similar calls. In Lk 7:26 John will be described as “more than a prophet”; he is also the precursor of Jesus (Lk 7:27), a transitional figure inaugurating the period of the fulfillment of prophecy and promise.

[3:3] See note on Mt 3:2.

[3:4] The Essenes from Qumran used the same passage to explain why their community was in the desert studying and observing the law and the prophets (1QS 8:12–15).

10 And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?”

11 He said to them in reply, “**Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.**”

12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

13 He answered them, “**Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.**”

14 Soldiers also asked him, “And what is it that we should do?” He told them, “**Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages.**”

15 Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah.

16 John answered them all, saying, “**I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.**

17 His winnowing fan is in his hand to **clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.**”

18 Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

19 Now **Herod the tetrarch**, who had been censured by him because of Herodias, **his brother’s wife**, and because of all the evil deeds Herod had committed,

20 added still another to these by [also] putting John in prison.

The Baptism of Jesus.

21 After all the people had been baptized and **Jesus also had been baptized and was praying**, 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 beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.**”

The Genealogy of Jesus.

23 When Jesus began his ministry, he was about thirty years of age. He was the son, as was thought, of

Joseph, the son of Heli,

24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai,

26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda,

27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri,

[3:16] **He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire: in contrast to John’s baptism with water, Jesus is said to baptize with the holy Spirit and with fire.** From the point of view of the early Christian community, the Spirit and fire must have been understood in the light of the fire symbolism of the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4); **but as part of John’s preaching, the Spirit and fire should be related to their purifying and refining characteristics** (Ez 36:25–27; Mal 3:2–3). See note on Mt 3:11.

[3:17] Winnowing fan: see note on Mt 3:12.

[3:19–20] Luke separates the ministry of John the Baptist from that of Jesus by reporting the imprisonment of John before the baptism of Jesus (Lk 3:21–22). Luke uses this literary device to serve his understanding of the periods of salvation history. With John the Baptist, the time of promise, the period of Israel, comes to an end; with the baptism of Jesus and the descent of the Spirit upon him, the time of fulfillment, the period of Jesus, begins. In his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, Luke will introduce the third epoch in salvation history, the period of the church.

[3:21–22] This episode in Luke focuses on the heavenly message identifying Jesus as Son and, through the allusion to Is 42:1, as Servant of Yahweh. The relationship of Jesus to the Father has already been announced in the infancy narrative (Lk 1:32, 35; 2:49); it occurs here at the beginning of Jesus’ Galilean ministry and will reappear in Lk 9:35 before another major section of Luke’s gospel, the travel narrative (Lk 9:51–19:27). Elsewhere in Luke’s writings (Lk 4:18; Acts 10:38), this incident will be interpreted as a type of anointing of Jesus.

[3:21] **Was praying: Luke regularly presents Jesus at prayer at important points in his ministry:** here at his baptism; at the choice of the Twelve (Lk 6:12); before Peter’s confession (Lk 9:18); at the transfiguration (Lk 9:28); when he teaches his disciples to pray (Lk 11:1); at the Last Supper (Lk 22:32); on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:41); on the cross (Lk 23:46).

[3:22] You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased: this is the best attested reading in the Greek manuscripts. The Western reading, “You are my SON, this day I have begotten you,” is derived from Ps 2:7.

[3:23–38] Whereas Mt 1:2 begins the genealogy of Jesus with Abraham to emphasize Jesus’ bonds with the people of Israel, Luke’s universalism leads him to trace the descent of Jesus beyond Israel to Adam and beyond that to God (Lk 3:38) to stress again Jesus’

28 the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam,
 the son of Elmadam, the son of Er,
 29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim,
 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi,
 30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph,
 the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim,
 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of
 Mattatha, the son of **Nathan, the son of David**,
 32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the
 son of Sala, the son of Nahshon,
 33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of
 Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of
 Judah,
 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of
 Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,
 35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the
 son of Eber, the son of Shelah,
 36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of
 Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,
 37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of
 Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan,
 38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of **Adam, the
 son of God**.

divine sonship.

[3:31] **The son of Nathan, the son of David**: in keeping with Jesus' prophetic role in Luke and Acts (e.g., Lk 7:16, 39; 9:8; 13:33; 24:19; Acts 3:22–23; 7:37) **Luke traces Jesus' Davidic ancestry through the prophet Nathan** (see 2 Sm7:2) rather than through King Solomon, as Mt 1:6–7.

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The wilderness had nourished the stern, solitary spirit of the Baptist, and there the consciousness of his mission and his message 'came to him'-a phrase which at once declares his affinity with the old prophets.

Out of the desert he burst on the nation,
sudden as lightning, and cleaving like it.

Luke says nothing as to his garb or food, but goes straight to the heart of his message,

'The baptism of repentance unto remission of sins,' in which expression the 'remission' depends neither on 'baptism' alone, nor on 'repentance' alone.

The outward act was vain if unaccompanied by the state of mind and will; the state of mind was proved genuine by submitting to the act.

Bible Study Questions

1. Why does Luke mention the political and religious leaders at the beginning of this chapter?
2. How does John the Baptist's ministry fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah?
3. Why does John emphasize ethical behavior in response to repentance?
4. How does John the Baptist's message of the coming Messiah establish the expectations for Jesus' ministry?

- 5.** What is the significance of John rebuking Herod, and what does this tell us about John's character and mission?
- 6.** What does the baptism of Jesus symbolize, and why is it important in His life and ministry?
- 7.** What is the significance of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove?
- 8.** What does God the Father's proclamation about Jesus at His baptism reveal about their relationship?
- 9.** How does the genealogy of Jesus connect Him with key figures in the Old Testament and with all of humanity?
- 10.** How do the events in Luke 3 prepare the way for the public ministry of Jesus?
- 11.** How does John's call for repentance speak to us today, and how can we apply it to our lives?
- 12.** How can we reconcile the harsh imagery of winnowing fork, threshing floor, and unquenchable fire with our understanding of a loving God?
- 13.** How does John's humility in his ministry provide an example for us in our service to God?
- 14.** How does Jesus' divine affirmation during His baptism impact our understanding of His identity and mission?
- 15.** How does understanding Jesus' genealogy enhance our grasp of His humanity and divinity?
- 16.** In what ways does John the Baptist's confrontation with Herod challenge us to stand for righteousness in our present-day context?
- 17.** How does the account of Jesus' baptism inform our understanding of the significance of our own baptism?
- 18.** In what ways does Jesus' genealogy affirm the inclusivity of God's plan of salvation?
- 19.** How does John's call to ethical living following repentance apply to us today?
- 20.** In the context of John's message, how do we discern the wheat and the chaff in our own lives?