

Luke 3



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Luke 3
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Introduction to Luke 3

Luke 3 focuses on the ministry of John the Baptist, culminating in the baptism of Jesus and the recording of His genealogy.

John's is a message of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord. He is rough, straightforward, unyielding, and humble, all at the same time. John's message, based on Isaiah's, is true not just for when we first come to salvation, but for continuing to grow in it. We must ever seek the filling of God's Spirit from a humble and contrite heart, calling on the Lord for mercy and grace to smooth our path and all our ways.

He is an apt forerunner for the coming King.

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We hope you find this study of the gospel of Luke instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Voices in the Wilderness

Pray Psalm 98.2, 3.

The LORD has made known His salvation;
His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.
He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel;
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Sing Psalm 98.2, 3.

(Duke Street: *Come, Let Us Sing unto the Lord*)

Now is God's saving mercy known; His glory to the world is shown.
Faithful and kind is God our Lord; earth has the Name of Jesus heard.

Read and meditate on Luke 3.1-6.

Preparation

1. How did Luke pin the events of this chapter to a specific historical time?
2. How did he tie these events into the larger, real world of God's Word?

Meditation

Here again Luke reminds us that the events he is recording took place in the real world – the world of men, nations, and times as well as the eternal, unchanging, and unfailing world of the Word of God. He instructs us always to remember that we live in two worlds at once – the world that we see with our eyes and the one we see by faith. These are the real world, from which and into which Jesus came among us. We must work to maintain a proper integration of these two realms into the one real world in which we, like John, are called to herald the Good News of Jesus.

John was in the wilderness when the Word of God came to him (v. 2). His response was immediate: “he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching” (v. 3). In doing so, John was being moved by the Spirit of God, Who gave ancient prophecies concerning him to the prophet Isaiah (vv. 4-6). John was the voice crying in the wilderness to announce to his world, as the shepherds had done some thirty years before, that “the salvation of God” has come to the world (v. 6).

The effects of this would be levelling. We note that, in the Hebrew, Isaiah used the divine name, LORD, as the Bringer of salvation; here, Luke applies that Name to Jesus. All would be equal in sin before the LORD. The lowly and the high, the crooked and the straight, the rough and the smooth would all stand guilty before the LORD, to see Him and the salvation He brings to the world (vv. 5, 6). John would be the forerunner, not only of the LORD but of all who, like John, receive the Word and are sent to proclaim the LORD's salvation to the people in their Personal Mission Field.

Working your Personal Mission Field, you might feel like a voice crying in the wilderness. And so you are! Do not be deterred and do not despair. Cry on, friends, so that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Just look at that list of people who oversaw the government and the church when John was the forerunner of Jesus' ministry! Many of the names are recognizable because we know them as conspirators and killers of both the preparer and the One for Whom he was preparing the way (Lk. 3.1, 2). But those enemies of the

Good News could not stop it.

The Fellowship of Ailbe now reaches into 181 countries, so those reading this will have different names to fill

in the blanks of their present government and church leaders. But the impact and the truth of Jesus remains the same—for He and His message are “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb.13.8). Each of us are called into our own Personal Mission Field to prepare the way for Jesus to bring life and change into many minds, hearts, and souls abiding therein. And again, nothing can stop this Good News of redemption and life.

Jesus said, “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12.44-46). God took us out of darkness through His great demonstration of love for us by the death of His dear Son (Rom. 5.8), and then we were reconciled to Him and saved by Jesus’ life (Rom. 5.10). And nothing can stop the movement of His Spirit into the lives of His chosen people (1 Pet. 2.9, 10).

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8.31, 32) “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom. 8.35) “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8.37).

The question asked many years ago by the psalmist is still relevant today: “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?” (Ps. 2.1)

He has chosen His King, and His King will reign forever (Lk. 1.33).

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen. Amen.*
(Gloria Patri, 2nd century)

For reflection

1. What was John the Baptist appointed to do?
2. In what ways is his calling like your own calling to be a witness for Jesus (Acts 1.8)?
3. Could anything stop John from fulfilling His calling? Should anything stop you? Explain.

... the Word came that the desolate earth would bring forth fruit for us. The Word came, and the voice followed, for the Word first works within before the voice follows. Hence David too says, “I believed, and then I spoke.” Ambrose of Milan (333-397), Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 2.67

Pray Psalm 98.4-9.

Rejoice in the Lord and in His salvation! Ask Him to use you today to share the Good News of Jesus with someone in your Personal Mission Field. Know that all creation rejoices when we proclaim the Gospel.

Sing Psalm 98.2, 3.

(Duke Street: *Come, Let Us Sing unto the Lord*)

Raise to the Lord your loudest voice! Break forth and sing! Rejoice! Rejoice!
Praise, praise to You our God and King, with all our hearts and strength we bring!

Now let the whole creation ‘round burst into song with joyous sound!
Jesus will come to judge the earth; let all proclaim His matchless worth!

2 Hard Words

Pray Psalm 119.59-62.

I thought about my ways,
And turned my feet to Your testimonies.
I made haste, and did not delay
To keep Your commandments.
The cords of the wicked have bound me,
But I have not forgotten Your law.
At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You,
Because of Your righteous judgments.

Sing Psalm 119.59-62.

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

Though wicked ways constrain and bind my hands in sin,
yet I recall Your Word and turn to You again.
By night I thank You, LORD; my voice to You I raise;
for all Your righteous, holy Word I give You praise.

Read Luke 3.1-9; meditate on verses 7-9.

Preparation

1. What did John require of the people who came to him?
2. What did he say was being thrown into the fire?

Meditation

We recall that John's ministry was to call people to prepare for the coming of the *LORD*, that they might see and receive the salvation He brings (Lk. 3.4-6). We might wonder what kind of "preparation" is needed for such a glorious gift. John does not leave us guessing.

John was not a very welcoming preacher: "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (v. 7) Not very friendly to those seekers who had come out to have a look at this strange prophet. He called them to repent of their sins and bring forth fruits that showed the proof of repentance in their souls (v. 8). Mere cultural identity, family heritage, or confession of faith ("We have Abraham as *our* father") would not do. People need to repent sincerely. Otherwise, we will be in danger of the wrath of God (v. 9).

As we shall see in the examples that follow (vv. 10-14), repentance involves the denial of all selfish desires and thoughtful consideration of the persons and needs of others. What we must be on guard to repent of is inordinate love of self that goes beyond what is proper for loving others, and instead puts the persons and needs of others at one's disposal as objects to use for personal aggrandizement. We will not know the salvation of the Lord if self-love is the dominant affection of our soul.

These were hard words, to be sure. Yet they came to John in "multitudes" (v. 7) because they sensed something both about the urgency of his message and their own need. Here was a prophet who meant business, and they were people weighed down by the burden of their sin.

Repentance is the great leveler (v. 5). We all need it if we would be saved (cf. Acts 2.37, 38; 17.30, 31).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The Church needs John the Baptist, and we need him now! Don't you wish he'd show up in your church's

pulpit this Sunday morning?

We need to hear his message. We need to stop being entertained and start being taught. And called to repentance and new life in Christ.

Jesus preached this same message: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matt. 7.15-20).

The LORD, through the prophet Jeremiah, preached this message: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 17.9, 10).

And what is this good fruit, the fruit of our doings? It is the fruit that we produce when we are filled with the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5.22, 23). Which sounds an awful lot like living out the Law of God (Ex. 20.1-17; Matt. 22.37-40).

Why is the Church failing? Because people want something to believe in and act upon. Something so grand that they are willing to give their lives for it daily. We do not need to be entertained or made to laugh or hear some sappy story that tugs at our heartstrings. We need a word like John’s: “Brood of vipers!” (Lk. 3.8) That will get our attention! We need to get busy about turning from sin, turning to the Law, and living our lives like Solomon described: “Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on” (Prov. 4.14, 15).

When we are bearing “fruits worthy of repentance” (Lk. 3.8) we will be walking God’s way. “But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4.18).

Hard words bring good results when heard by wise ears. “A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel (Prov. 1.5).

For reflection

1. How would you explain the discipline of repentance to a new believer?
2. Why did John need to be so harsh with the people who were coming to him? We need more of that straightforward harshness today. Explain.
3. Is God calling you to repent of any sin? What does He promise if you do?

John affirms, that the solemn declaration, which they made, is not enough, but that, in process of time, their works will make it evident, whether or not they have seriously repented. It ought to be observed, that good works (Titus 3:8) are here called fruits of repentance: for repentance is an inward matter, which has its seat in the heart and soul, but afterwards yields its fruits in a change of life. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Matthew 3.8 and Luke 3.8

Pray Psalm 119.57, 58, 63, 64.

Call on the Lord to prepare you to keep His words today, to show you His favor, empower you for repentance, and use you to encourage your fellow believers to walk in His Word.

Sing Psalm 119.57, 58, 63, 64.

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

I vow to keep Your Word; You are my portion, LORD.

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Let favor fill my heart; have mercy by Your Word!
When I think on my way, I turn my feet to You,
to Your path I shall not delay, Your Word to do.

All those who fear You, LORD, go with me on my way,
all those who keep Your holy Word from day to day.
Around us all the earth declares Your mercy, LORD.
That I might know Your glorious worth, teach me Your Word.

3 The Cure of Contraries

Pray Psalm 72.1-4.

Give the king Your judgments, O God,
And Your righteousness to the king's Son.
He will judge Your people with righteousness,
And Your poor with justice.
The mountains will bring peace to the people,
And the little hills, by righteousness.
He will bring justice to the poor of the people;
He will save the children of the needy,
And will break in pieces the oppressor.

Sing Psalm 72.1-4.

(Martyrdom: *Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed*)

O give the King Your judgment, Lord, and righteousness Your Son;
and let Him judge by Your good Word the need of everyone.

Let now the mountains ring with peace, the hills in righteousness.
Let justice rise, oppression cease, and all the needy bless.

Read Luke 3.1-14; meditate on verses 10-14.

Preparation

1. What did the people ask John?
2. How did John reply?

Meditation

In the monasteries of medieval Ireland, a sincere effort was sustained to encourage holiness. Naturally, this involved much time in prayer and meditating on God's Word. But it also involved the discipline of penance, which is that part of repentance where Kingdom life replaces self-life so that love can flourish. The old monastics had a saying: "Contraries are by contraries cured." That is, if one was found to have in his life a behavior *contrary* to the Word of God, he would confess his sin and declare repentance, after which his mentor or soul friend would recommend steps to take *contrary* to that sinful behavior to reestablish the ways of righteousness.

This is what we see John doing here. The people want to know what they must *do* to repent truly (v. 10). John gives an example. If you have two tunics and you know your neighbor has none, then you are acting *contrary* to God's love to keep both for yourself. The right *contrary* step to take is to share a tunic with your neighbor (v. 11). Cure that contrary, sinful behavior of self-love by a contrary action of neighbor love.

To the tax collectors, John was indirect. They probably charged a bit more for taxes and skimmed from their neighbors. It's one reason they were so hated. John doesn't say as much, but by telling them to collect *only* what is due, he hints at their practice and calls them to forsake all stealing (vv. 12, 13).

The same for the soldiers. Soldiers could be known to take advantage of civilians and to grumble about their pay. John told them to stop such behaviors and learn contentment (v. 14).

Whatever in our lives is contrary to God's Law must be eradicated by confession and repentance. This will involve *penance* as well, taking up new behaviors which, because they are contrary to sinful practices, can cure those sinful ways so that we may increase in holiness.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The absolute Spirit-filled genius of John's response is that he spoke into each person's life. He did not say to the people: "You should be better soldiers." Nor did he say to the tax collectors: "You should be better doctors." And to the soldiers he did not say: "You should be better hairdressers." He told each one how to be better in the job and life that they had. And he most certainly did not say: "You should all become pastors or some kind of professional believer."

Rather, he called each one, right where they were, to be Christ-ones to those in their Personal Mission Field. "But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk." "Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called" (1 Cor. 7.17, 20). And in that calling we are to be salt and light to those we know there.

And when we are confronted with our own sin, we are to deal with that sin, and turn away from it. In our own sphere. In our own life. Dealing with the sins that so easily beset us there. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12.1).

We have this promise from God as we strive to cure our sinful behavior by contraries: "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13.5).

If we asked John what we should do to show God and others that we have repented, he would speak to each one of us right where we are, in our personal circumstances, and our work, in our Mission Field. And the Holy Spirit can certainly inform us how to do this: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (Jms. 1.5).

We are all different, in different walks of life, and different circumstances; but we all have the same Law to follow (Ex. 20.1-17; Matt. 22.37-40). The other beautiful part of John's response is this: when we each one are living in the Kingdom of God and living out His mandates, each one in their own Personal Mission Field, then everyone benefits. And that is when the Church becomes "the joy of the whole earth" (Ps. 48.2).

For reflection

1. How would you explain the idea of Personal Mission Field to a believing friend?
2. What is penance? How does Romans 12.21 help you in thinking about this question?
3. Being a Christian means living for Jesus right where you are. Everywhere you are. How should you prepare for this each day?

A true feeling of repentance produces in the mind of the poor sinner an eager desire to know what is the will or command of God. John's reply explains, in a few words, the fruits worthy of repentance... John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Luke 3.10*

Pray Psalm 72.12-17.

Pray that the Lord will help you to repent of any sins, and that He will use you today as an agent of His grace, to bring the Good News of His Kingdom to others by your life and words.

Sing Psalm 72.12-17.

(Martyrdom: Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed)

The Lord the needy rescues when he cries to Him for grace.
All they who suffer violence find mercy before His face.

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Let Christ be praised and all the gold of Sheba be His right.
Let blessings to His Name be told, and prayers made both day and night.

And let the earth abound with grain, let fields His fame proclaim.
And may our King forever reign and nations bless His great Name.

4 Things to Come

Pray Psalm 96.1-4.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.
For the LORD *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He *is* to be feared above all gods.

Sing Psalm 96.1-4.

(Mit Freuden Zart: *Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)
Sing to the Lord! O, bless His Name! All nations tell His glory!
Salvation's tidings loud proclaim; let earth rehearse His story!
For God is greatly to be praised; His throne above all gods is raised!
Fear Him, and sing His glory!

Read Luke 3.1-20; meditate on verses 15-20.

Preparation

1. What were the people reasoning about concerning John?
2. How did John answer them?

Meditation

Here is an example of how the Scriptures point forward, point forward, point forward to Jesus, either His first coming, His second, or both.

It's clear that the people of Israel, under the oppression of Rome, entertained a hope that Messiah would soon arrive to free them. Was this leather-garbed, locust-eating, fire-breathing prophet Him (v. 15)? Doubtless John heard the rumors and speculations (v. 15), and he answered by pointing forward to Jesus (vv. 16, 17). He would be coming soon. He would baptize us with the Holy Spirit. He would gather His true wheat into His barn. He would burn the chaff with fire.

John basically laid out the whole large scope of Jesus' ministry during His incarnation, His session at the Father's right hand, and His return. John was not the Messiah. Messiah was coming, is coming now, and will come again. If that does not make our souls leap for joy and abound with courage and love, nothing will.

Alas, however, John's ministry and life would be cut short in yet another foreshadowing of Jesus. As John was imprisoned and martyred for speaking the truth of God (vv. 18-20), so Jesus also would be by another Roman lackey some few years hence. John's fate points toward that of Jesus.

And Jesus' resurrection points forward to John's and ours. Because of His coming, glory is coming, and that right soon and forever.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son...” (Gal. 4.4). And that is the point of all history: The fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah.

John knew this. It is one of the reasons he was so special. He knew his calling, he knew his purpose, and he

knew beyond a shadow of a doubt Who was to receive the glory. So, when Herod added to all his other atrocious sins the travesty of putting John in prison (Lk. 3.20), he was probably not surprised. He had begun to see the problems inherent in loyal folks following the wrong leader. And disputes happening between his disciples and some of the Jews about Jesus baptizing, and who was in charge. “Behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!” (Jn. 3.22-26)

John’s response? “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3.30).

John did not want to be mistaken for the Messiah. His life’s goal was to prepare the way for the Messiah. And his humility was unmistakable. Please understand, he said, “I indeed baptize with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk. 3.16).

John’s greatest desire was to proclaim the glory of God. He was not trying to hold onto his own work or popularity. He was willing to give it all up for the glory and worship of the Triune God. He knew the truth about glory and to Whom it belonged:

“I AM the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another...” (Is. 42.8).

“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever” (Matt. 6.13).

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1.14).

“...to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever” (Rom. 16.27).

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev. 4.11).

John’s knowledge of his place and purpose in history is something that all Christians must take to heart. As Jesus taught the people and His disciples: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mk. 8.34).

John the Baptist was a preparer. He showed us all how to get out of the way and let Jesus shine!

For reflection

1. John knew his calling. Do you know yours? Explain.
2. What does it mean to live for the glory of God?
3. How are you asking Jesus to shine through you today?

Then he entered the temple—but not by chance or naively. He came to the temple in the Spirit of God.... If you wish to hold Jesus, and to embrace him with your hands, and to be made worthy of leaving prison, you too must struggle with every effort to possess the guiding Spirit. Origen (185-254), Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 15.1-3

Pray Psalm 96.5-13.

Pray for the lost people of the world, who are confused or uncertain or unbelieving about God and Jesus Christ. Pray for a worldwide awakening to faith, and pray that God will use your prayers and witness to help bring that about.

Sing Psalm 96.5-13.

(Mit Freuden Zart: Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above)

All other gods are idols vain; the Lord created heaven.

Splendor and strength with Him obtain; to Him be glory given!

All fam’lies, praise this mighty Lord! Give strength and glory to His Word;

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exalt the Lord of heaven.

Bring offerings sweet to Him, our Lord, in holy garments praise Him!
Tremble before Him, all the earth; among the nations raise Him!
The earth is fixed, it will not move; the peoples will His justice prove.
Exalt the Lord and praise Him.

Let heaven sing with lusty voice; let earth and sea sing sweetly!
Let fields and trees in Him rejoice, for He is coming swiftly
to judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in His faithfulness.
He comes; exalt Him greatly!

5 Watershed

Pray Psalm 2.7, 8.

“I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
Ask of Me, and I will give You
The nations for Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth for Your possession.”

Sing Psalm 2.7, 8.

(Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High)

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!
From heav'n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

Read Luke 3.1-22; meditate on verses 21, 22.

Preparation

1. Which Persons of the divine Trinity were present at the baptism of Jesus?
2. What did the voice from heaven say?

Meditation

John's baptism was for repentance unto the remission of sins. Jesus did not need repentance, nor would He ever. He did not require remission of sins, for He had none. Ever. So why was He baptized? Two reasons.

First, in His baptism Jesus identified with His people, affirming their need for cleansing from sin and renewal into the life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. As He explained to a reluctant John, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3.15). Jesus dramatized their need by identifying with that sacrament which confirmed their forgiveness and established them in newness of life. Not that baptism saves; it does not. But baptism signifies that forgiveness has been received and a new life of salvation has begun; and, in a deeply spiritual sense, it seals those great truths to one who is baptized. The Word of God became incarnate in Jesus both to identify with and take on the burden of the sins of the world (Jn. 1.29).

Second, Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of His bringing near the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 4.17). This is confirmed by the LORD's quoting the second psalm as a voice from heaven, a psalm used at the coronation of a new king in Israel, but ultimately pointing forward to Jesus. God Himself speaks the words He gave the psalmist to confirm that Jesus is His beloved Son and anointed Servant (cf. Is. 42.1). From this point forward the ancient prophecy of Psalm 2 would begin to be fulfilled over all the earth. The Kingdom would not come to earth until the Spirit brought it in Acts 2. But for now, Jesus is anointed as the Warrior King to obtain that great prize by defeating His enemies – Satan, sin, and death. For the devil and his ilk, the baptism of Jesus was the shot heard 'round the world.

Here we see all three Persons of the divine Trinity united in the watershed moment of all history. The Father commends, the Spirit descends, and the Son attends to the Father's Word. After this event, nothing would ever be the same.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“You are My witnesses,” says the LORD,
and My servant whom I have chosen,

that you may know and believe Me,
and understand that I AM He.
Before Me there was no God formed,
nor shall there be after Me.
I, even I, AM the LORD,
and besides Me there is no Savior” (Is. 43.10, 11).

Can you imagine this scene recorded for us in Luke 3.21, 22? Here for the first time, on planet earth, the three equal parts of the Trinity appeared together! The I AM God, Who has always been and always will be, sent the Holy Spirit, Who has also always been and always will be, to descend upon Jesus in the bodily form of a Dove, to set the stage for the Father’s formal introduction of His beloved Son, in Whom He was “well pleased”, to the world (Lk. 3.22).

Heaven came down and met at the riverside. For us. To be with us. This One Whose name is Immanuel (Matt. 1.23).

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1.1).
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (Jn. 1.1, 2).
“Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the LORD GOD and His Spirit have sent Me” (Is. 48.16).

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Great Triune God says to us:
“Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!
For I AM God, and there is no other.
I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,
and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall take an oath” (Is. 45.22, 23).

“...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2.10, 11).

“United in the watershed moment of all history”... and truly, nothing has ever been the same.

For reflection

1. How does Jesus submitting to baptism help you to think about the importance of this sacrament?
2. What makes the birth and baptism of Jesus a “watershed” moment in history?
3. God was well-pleased with His Son. What does this suggest for us?

For it follows that he who is first in everything must set the example in this too. He commences the work himself in order that we may learn about the power of holy baptism and learn how much we gain by approaching so great a grace. Having been baptized, he prays that you, my beloved, may learn that never-ceasing prayer is a thing most fitting for those who have once been counted worthy of holy baptism. Cyril of Alexandria (375-444), Commentary on Luke, Homily 11

Pray Psalm 2.9-12.

Pray for the coming of Christ’s rule on earth as it is in heaven, and for your own work today in seeing that vision come to pass. Pray that God will use you as His ambassador and witness so that others might look to Jesus for salvation.

Sing Psalm 2:9-12.

(Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High)

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!
Beware His anger and judgment grim. How blessed are all who rest in Him!

6 The Genealogy of Jesus

Pray Psalm 87.1-3.

His foundation *is* in the holy mountains.
The LORD loves the gates of Zion
More than all the dwellings of Jacob.
Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God!

Sing Psalm 87.1-4.

(St. Anne: *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*)

Upon the holy mountains rest the footings of the Lord,
Who loves of Israel's flock the best the keepers of His Word.

For glorious things are spoken of the City of our God;
The nations know His matchless love wher'er His feet have trod.

Read Luke 3.1-38; meditate on verses 23-38.

Preparation

1. Where does the genealogy of Jesus end?
2. What does it say about Joseph?

Meditation

The genealogy of Jesus in the gospel of Luke is an *ascending* genealogy (as opposed to a *descending* genealogy, as in Matthew 1.1-16). It begins with Jesus and works its way back through time to Adam and God. In so doing it locates Jesus in His heavenly, as well as His earthly provenance. Some commentators suggest that the phrase “as was supposed” in relation to Joseph could indicate that this is Mary’s genealogy – and that Heli (v. 23) was her father, and not Joseph’s.

The genealogy lists 76 generations from Adam to Jesus, suggesting that the generation that descends from Jesus – all those who believe in Him and are born again (Jn. 1.12) – is the 77th generation, a number symbolic both of completion and forgiveness (cf. Lk. 17.4). In this view, the generation spawned by Jesus would be the generation that realizes the fulfillment of God’s covenant, as Zacharias prophesied (Lk. 1.67-75).

Luke’s genealogy covers the entire scope of redemptive history from its beginning in eternity to the incarnation of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry. Luke tells us that the book of Acts is the continuing record of what Jesus *began* to do, as he reported in his gospel. Here he suggests that his gospel is the continuing record of what God *began* to do in the Old Testament. His genealogy has the effect of “Previously in the unfolding of the divine plan for redemption...”

In this genealogy Jesus is presented both as the Son of God and as the second Adam. Since Jesus is the new Adam, and forgiveness and wholeness are the gifts He brings, the Church is the new creation and the new garden of Eden, in and from which God unfolds His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, joy, and power in the Holy Spirit.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Whether ascending or descending, the genealogies of Jesus always arrive at the same conclusion: Jesus Christ is the Son of God! (Lk. 3.38; Matt. 1.18) “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Mk. 9.7)

God proclaimed those words at the transfiguration of Jesus. Moses and Elijah were both in attendance along with a few disciples, but the Scriptures clarify that when God's voice was heard, they looked around and "saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves" (Mk. 9.8).

God's people have known from the beginning that He would send His Son to earth, in "the fullness of the time" (Gal. 4.4) to save them from their sins (Matt. 1.21). Agur, the author of Proverbs 30 asked these questions a long time ago:

"Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has bound the waters in a garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is His name, and what is His Son's name,
If you know?" (Prov. 30.4)

And we do know His name: It is Jesus.

"...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Lk. 3.38).

"The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'" (Ps. 2.7).

"I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son" (Heb. 1.5).

Peter testified to this truth, having been an eyewitness to the Son's transfiguration and the Father's voice: "For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts..." (2 Pet. 1.17-19).

And we must heed this Word, as well, for it portends a life and death matter:

Jesus asked His disciples this question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter rightly answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16.15, 16).

"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (Jn. 3.35, 36).

The genealogy of Jesus is authentic, historic, trustworthy, and beyond dispute. In fact, our very lives depend on its validity.

For reflection

1. Why is it important to have this genealogy of Jesus?
2. This genealogy connects Jesus to God's covenant and the kingdom of David. Why is this important?
3. What other names in this genealogy "point forward" to Jesus and His work?

Matthew's list of the forefathers of Jesus showed that Christ was the son of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed, and heir to the throne of David; but Luke shows that Jesus was the Seed of the woman that should break the serpent's head, and traces the line up to Adam, beginning with Eli, or Heli, the father, not of Joseph, but of Mary. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Luke 3.23-38

Pray Psalm 87.5-7.

Pray for the people of God worldwide, that all whom God is calling to Himself through Jesus may be "registered" for salvation, and may rejoice in the Lord and His goodness. Make a point to pray for specific

believers you expect to see today, and ask the Lord to show you how you can encourage them in their walk with and work for Him.

Sing Psalm 87.5-7.

(St. Anne: *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*)

From south and north, from east and west they come, called by His grace;
Thus Zion stands, full strong and blessed, before the Savior's face.

The Lord will count and tally all in Jesus born again.

Then let them sing, who on Him call, "We joy in God, Amen!"

7 To Know the Salvation of the Lord

Pray Psalm 116.4-6.

Then I called upon the name of the LORD:
“O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!”
Gracious *is* the LORD, and righteous;
Yes, our God *is* merciful.
The LORD preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.

Sing Psalm 116.4-6.

(Mit Freuden Zart: *Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)
I called to God, “O Lord, I pray, my soul redeem with favor!”
The Lord is gracious in His way, and righteous is our Savior.
His mercy to the simple flies; He lifted me up to the skies –
I rest in Him forever!

Read Luke 3.1-38; meditate on verses 4-6.

Preparation

1. What did John come to prepare?
2. What would be the result of his work?

Meditation

Straight. Filled. Low. Smooth. This is how we prepare to know the salvation Jesus came to bring. Isaiah (40.3-5) used poetic language to impress his readers with how they may expect to realize the salvation of the Lord (v. 6). We must *humble* ourselves (low) and *turn* from our crooked ways (straight) so that we may be *filled* with God’s Spirit by the *smooth* working of His grace in our lives.

No one can be saved who is unwilling to come to the Lord on His terms: repentant, humbled, seeking grace, depending entirely on Him. Yes, salvation is a gift, but even to receive a gift one must hold forth his hands. It is the work of God’s Spirit to convert and empower us for salvation (Phil. 2.13; Gal. 4.4). When He comes, tearing out our heart of stone, opening our mind to the Good News of Jesus, and setting up shop in our conscience, then we will be humbled, repentant, and reached by the grace of the Lord. And then we will see His salvation.

John’s message, based on Isaiah’s, is true not just for when we first come to salvation, but for continuing to grow in it. We must ever seek the filling of God’s Spirit from a humble and contrite heart, calling on the Lord for mercy and grace to smooth our path and all our ways. More of God’s great salvation awaits us every day – exceedingly, abundantly more (Eph. 3.20)! Do we long to know more of the salvation of the Lord? Do we lift the cup of salvation and drink it down until we are positively controlled by it (Ps. 116.12-14)?

If so, we must humble ourselves, repent of all sins, cry out for grace, and yield to the filling of the Spirit day by day and moment by moment. Then truly we will know more of the salvation of the Lord.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct [make smooth or straight] your paths” (Prov. 3.5, 6).

Salvation is a gift of grace from our heavenly Father through the work of Jesus Christ His Son. John was put on earth to declare that message of love and forgiveness. “Yes, salvation is a gift, but even to receive a gift

one must hold forth his hands.”

But any gift that is only unwrapped and never appreciated or used becomes merely a dust-catcher. Do we allow our salvation to become a pointless gift if we don't strenuously work to make it useful?

We must put on this gift. Wear it. Use it. And be more fruitful because of it. Paul wrote a tutorial for us in how to prepare for our day and be ready to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and to wrestle against “the rulers of the darkness of this age” (Eph. 6.12-20). Here is his eight-step program:

1. Take up the whole armor of God (1 Sam. 17.45, 46).
2. Stand and surround your waist with God's truth (Jn. 14.6).
3. Put on the breastplate of righteousness (2 Cor. 5.21).
4. Put on your shoes and be ready to share the gospel of peace (1 Pet. 3.15).
5. Take the shield of faith that quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one (2 Cor. 5.7).
6. Take the helmet of salvation (2 Tim. 1.12; Rom. 8.38, 39).
7. Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ps. 119.11, 16, 89, 105).
8. Pray always, communing with God continuously (1 Thess. 5.16-18).

John came to prepare the way so that all mankind would “see the salvation of God” (Lk. 3.6). When we “hold forth our hands” to accept the gift, we gladly and joyously take it; and the rest of our lives we are saying “Thank You” by using, and working out our gift of salvation with appreciation, fear, and trembling (Phil. 2.12).

And on this smooth and straight path we will truly know the salvation of the Lord; and in this knowledge we are blessed and will be a blessing to our Personal Mission Field.

For reflection

1. What difference has the Lord's salvation made in your life?
2. In what areas of your life would you like to know more of the Lord's salvation?
3. What is your approach to applying Paul's eight-step program for realizing more of the Lord's salvation?

The meaning is: by his wonderful power, God will open a way to his people through impassable forests, through broken rocks, through a sandy desert; for he will have at hand the ministers of his grace, to remove all hindrances out of the way. But that was a shadowy anticipation of redemption. When the spiritual truth is about to appear, John is sent to remove obstacles. And even now the same voice sounds in our ears, that we may prepare the way of the Lord. John Calvin (1559-1564), Commentary on Luke 3.4-6

Pray Psalm 116.7-14.

Praise the Lord for all the blessings that come to you because of Jesus. Count those blessings back to Him with thanksgiving. Offer yourself as a living sacrifice to be an agent of grace to the people around you today.

Sing Psalm 116.7-14.

(Mit Freuden Zart: *Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

Full well the Lord has dealt with me; my soul from death He delivered.
My weeping eyes, my stumbling feet, He has redeemed forever.
Forever I before His face shall walk with those who know His grace,
and dwell with them forever.

Afflicted, I believe His Word, though lying men would undo me.
What shall I render to the Lord for all His blessings to me?
Salvation's cup I lift above and call upon the God of love

and pay my vows most truly.

Luke 3

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why do we need to “prepare” to know more of the Lord’s salvation? How do we do that?
2. Why is the genealogy important to the story of His life and work?
3. What do we learn from John about the importance of repentance?
4. What do we mean by saying that “contraries are by contraries cured”?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from our study of Luke 3?

For prayer:

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