



Dec. 9, 201 Luke 3: 1-6 & Baruch 5: 1-9

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

As I am composing this guide it is the 2nd year of the Trump presidency, and Kim Reynolds is governor of Iowa. Chuck Grassley is in the US senate from Iowa, Liz Mathis is in the Iowa senate and Bradley Hart is mayor of Cedar Rapids. The people of Iowa were being blitzed with political ads and personal appearances of candidates for the 2018 midterm elections. Each one lists their assessment of is needed fixing and what their ideas were that might make things better. Their campaign staffs are deep in setting up appointments. Their offices are recruiting people to make calls and house visits to prepare the ground for the one they hoped would be the next person to represent them and make things better. Their promises come fast and furious and if they get enough of our votes, life will be good for this “most important election of our lifetime”. This was what the composer of Luke’s gospel doing when he gives us all this information. He lets us fill in the blanks on what needed fixing then, we need to do the same for now.

Luke 3:1-6

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 **Traconitis**, 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 desert. 3 He went into all the country around the **Jordan**, **preaching a baptism** of **repentance** for the **forgiveness** of sins. 4 As is written in the book of the words of **Isaiah** the prophet: “A **voice** of one **calling** in the desert, ‘**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 mankind** will see God’s **salvation**.””

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Given the current state of affairs in the world, who is preaching hope for you?

PRAYER: Lord, we share the longing for your entering into our world that are new and more liberating. In this we share the same anxieties and hopes of those in John’s day. Our need for vision and renewed courage equals our ancestors of long ago. Help us to see that we need to turn around and look as our choices in new ways, so that we can cooperate with the graces you are eager to send to us. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

TIBERIUS CRRSAR / PONTIUS PILATE / HEROD / PHILIP / LYSANIAS (ANNAS /CAIAPHAS: Luke, our faithful recorder of events and people, is setting the stage for his gospel. like any good story, we need to have pegs to hang our plot on, and these people represent the power structures of Jesus’ adult life. Jews and Gentiles, rulers and priests are all named. These enable us to date the when, where, who, and why of Luke’s gospel.

Who would you name today to set the scene for your gospel if you were writing one today that could encompass this variety of people?

CAESAR / GOVERNOR / TETRARCH / HIGH PRIESTHOOD: From King, to governor, to regional ruler, to high priest, we are introduced to the power structures in place in order to set us up to see just what the stakes are as John and Jesus enter the scene.

What are the power structures today that Jesus would face if he were with us now in America ? How do you think his message would ‘play’ in this country?

JUDEA / GALILEE / ITUREA / TRACONITIS / AEILENE: Luke is very specific in naming the places that will be directly affected by the voice of John the Baptist. This new thing is going to impact lives of real people.

How does the gospel impact you in your here and now reality? Do your faith life and the choices you make spread out beyond your immediate surroundings? How?

WORD OF GOD: Many voices are out there ‘proclaiming’ the word of God.
How can you tell which ones to listen to?

JOHN: John was the last of the first covenant prophets. He came promising a second covenant. That covenant would be so much more than could be imagined that he felt unable to even ‘untie its sandals’.
Do you have a sense that God is readying you for much more of love in this Advent time? Who is John for you proclaiming this more-ness?

ZECHARIAH: Zechariah was struck dumb when John’s birth was announced. Now his son is a voice for God’s new revelation of love, Jesus.
Spend some time thinking about the Zechariah’s and John’s in your life. Who are they? How did they play a part in making God’s love real in your life?



JORDAN: The Jordan was the historical site of God’s people passing over to a deeper understanding of God’s love.
Do you have a Jordan in your life? Where is it?

PREACHING: Preaching is that which ‘speaks the word of the Lord’
Who is your favorite preacher? What makes them good at speaking the word of the Lord for you?

BAPTISM: Baptism carries the weight of death and rebirth in one ritual. It signifies that some ‘Jordan’ has been crossed, and it needs to be made real in some way.
Where were you ‘baptized’? When did you cross over’ into accepting God’s total unconditional love?

REPENTANCE /FORGIVENESS: John’s message was a reaffirmation of the message of the prophets before him.
What made the people pay attention now, when they did not before? What goes into that mysterious timing of the Spirit that enables you to hear where before you could not?

ISAIAH: John stands on the shoulders of Isaiah. Jesus will quote Isaiah more often than other prophets.
What is it about Isaiah that strikes a chord with John and Jesus? Did Isaiah’s understanding of God prepare the way for them both? How?

VOICE /CALLING: God chooses to use human voices to communicate with us.
Who is a voice for you today? What are they calling you to?

PREPARE / MAKE STRAIGHT PATHS: Advent is the time we set aside to prepare for a deeper understanding of God in our lives.
How are you preparing this year? What needs straightening out in order for this deeper understanding?

VALLEY / MOUNTAIN / HILL: God comes to us in the high and low places in our lives.
Where are the high places for you? The low places?

CROOKED / STRAIGHT / ROUGH / SMOOTH: These polarities represent the realities of our human lives. They suggest struggle and work.
How does this good news of Jesus’ birth into space and time, help to straighten out the crooked and smooth out the rough places in our growth in faith and love?

ALL MANKIND: Even though Jesus was born into this world in a specific place at a specific moment in time, he came for all, and for all time.
Spend some time this Advent in quiet imagination, that you are a special part of that total human kind, that God so loves that God entered our space time.

SALVATION: Salvation implies that something needs saving from something.
What do you need saving from this Advent? Who are you being saved for?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 3:3f // Mt. 3:1-10; Mk. 1:2-6; Lk. 3:4 // Is. 40:3ff; Jn. 1:23;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Bar. 5: 1-9; Ps. 126: 1-6; Phil. 1:4-11; Lk. 3:1-6;

Revised Common Lectionary: Mal. 3:1-4; Lk. 1: 68-79; Phil. 1: 3-11; Lk. 3: 1-6;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

[Life is Headed Somewhere Good this Advent](#)

Like Advent itself, hope is not something we conjure up ourselves by wishful thinking. It's not something we work at by focusing on the positive and avoiding the negative. It doesn't spring from optimism that the world will get better by human effort. It's rooted in the promise of God's faithfulness.... Only because God comes to us can we go to God. Only because God comes to us can we have hope we can go to God. George Mason

Advent invites us to grow in patience and to position our lives so that we do not miss what God is doing in the wide expanse of the world. May we slow down, spread out our whole lives before God, and practice patient watching for where the light of God is falling. May we catch a glimpse of this holy light, of the lives and places in the world that need our attention and are illumined by God's radiance so as to draw us near.

There's a story told about Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that helps illustrate this. Teilhard wasn't much given to wishful thinking or even to an optimistic temperament, but tended rather towards a lonely realism. Yet he was a man of real hope. For example, on one occasion, after giving a conference within which he laid out an historical vision of unity and peace for the world that paralleled the vision of scripture, he was challenged by some colleagues to this effect: "That's a wonderful, idealistic vision of things, but suppose we blow-up the world with a nuclear bomb, what happens to your vision then?" "That would set things back some millions of years," he replied, "but this will still come to fruition, not because I say so or because the facts right now indicate that it will, but because God promised it and in the resurrection of Jesus has shown that He is powerful enough to deliver on that promise."

First, the stage is set. As with the other Gospel, Luke prep for the story of Jesus with the mission of John the Baptist (3:1-20). However, he manages to tell that story to his own advantage. Not only does he set the story in the context of world hi (vv. 1-2), but he expands the quotation from Isaiah to include "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (3:6). This neatly the plan of the work to follow. In addition, John and his baptism is identified with repentance, which becomes an important p; Jesus's program. Pg. 140 Beck, Robert. *Jesus and his Enemies*.

Advent and Christmas are not solely about remembering the mystery of the Incarnation and celebrating the birth of Christ; but an opportunity to reflect on the process by which these same mysteries come to birth within each of us. Joy Ryan-Bloore

"Advent: the time to listen for footsteps — you can't hear footsteps when you're running yourself." -Bill McKibben

Although we continue to celebrate Advent as a season, it is considerably more than that. Advent is a way of life, lived in watchfulness for the God who comes -- not just at Christmas, but every day, in myriad ways and in many wonderful and sometimes distressing disguises. Therefore we wait -- not passively, twiddling our thumbs, but actively. [Patricia Sanchez](#)

Advent for us means acceptance of this totally new beginning. It means a readiness to have eternity and time meet not only in Christ, but in us, in Man, in our life, in our world, in our time. The beginning, therefore, is the end. We must accept the end, before we can begin. Or rather, to be more faithful to the complexity of life, we must accept the end in the beginning both together.

The secret of the Advent mystery is then the awareness that I begin where I end because Christ begins where I end. In more familiar terms: I live to Christ when I die to myself. I begin to live to Christ when I come to the "end" or to the "limit" of what divides me from my fellow man: what I am willing to step beyond this end, cross the frontier, become a stranger, enter into a wilderness which is not "myself," where I do not breathe the air or hear the familiar, comforting racket of my own city, where I am alone and defenseless in the desert of God.

The victory of Christ is by no means the victory of my city over "their" city. The exaltation of Christ is not the defeat and death of others in order that "my side" may be vindicated, that I may be proved "right." I must pass over, make the transition (pascha) from my end to my beginning, from my old life which has ended and which is now death to my new life which never was before and which now exists in Christ. [Thomas Merton](#). "Advent: Hope or Delusion?" in *Seasons of Celebration*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965: 96-97

The [gospel of the Ebionites](#) (in Epiphanius, *Against Heresies XXX.13.4,6*) 4 John was baptizing; and Pharisees went out to him and were baptized, and all Jerusalem. Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; his food was wild honey, tasting like manna, a cake in olive oil.

6 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, when Caiaphas was high priest, a certain man named John came baptizing with a baptism of repentance in the river Jordan. He was said to be of the family of Aaron the priest, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and all went out to him.

INFORMATION ON JOHN THE BAPTIST: JOSEPHUS ([ANTIQUITIES OF THE JEWS](#)) Book 18, chapter 5, Section 2.

2. Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him.

Baptism means immersion. If our mission as Church is to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit, it means to discover and help others to discover the immersion of God in our world, or rather, that our world is immersed in God. Fr. David Bock

Separating vulnerability from power leads to violence. Power without vulnerability leads to brutal, empty victory over others. Victory over others in turn leads to ever-growing alienation. Power connected to vulnerability leads to the indestructible freedom of reconciliation with oneself and with others, including the enemy.

Leonard Desroches. NCR 12/23/05 Pg.16. Jesus' birth proves the power of vulnerability.

Roughly speaking, between 150 BC and AD 250 a general "baptist" movement existed in Palestine. Numerous Judaic and Messianist groups at this time practiced some kind of ritual washing, or baptism. These groups included the Essenes at Qumran, the Ebionites, John and his disciples, Jesus and his disciples (see John 3:25; 4:1), and a variety of Gnostic believers. In the [Qumran Rule of the Community](#) (5:13-14) we read: "They [prospective members of the community] shall not enter the water (in order) to share in the pure meal of the saints [the Qumran community], for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from evil-doing; for all who transgress his word are unclean." Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus—Cycle C](#) The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1997. Pages4, 6.

In **Origin: [Against Celsus](#)**, a writer born in 185CE, Origin was arguing against the notion put forth by Celsus, that Christianity was composed of simple-minded, uneducated members of the lower classes who had been hoodwinked into abandoning the revered traditions of their ancestors by reports of Jesus, a disreputable magician of dubious character. In book 1 chapter 40 he goes on at length about the birth of Jesus from a virgin, and tries to show by attacking the way Celsus, in his book called *The True Doctrine*, that his theory is unfounded. Ehrman, Bart. [After the New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998. Pages 82ff.

For an earliest generation of Christians, Jesus was not the Savior but the Life-giver. In the original Aramaic of Jesus and his followers, there was no word for salvation. Salvation was understood as bestowal of life, and to be saved was "to be made alive." This gift of life, moreover, was received in a clear rite of initiation, following the pattern of Jesus' own initiation. According to the ancient, Aramaic-derived traditions, Jesus' divine sonship began not in his sacrificial death on the cross, but in his spirit-filled baptism in the Jordan River. Entering the waters at the hand of John the Baptist, he emerged as the Life-giver (in Syriac, *Mahyana*), upon whom the Spirit "rested." He came forth also as *Ihidaya*, "the only one," or "the Unified One," and in this pattern his initiates became known also as *ihidaya*, "those who are one." Bourgeault, Cynthia. [The Gift of Life: The Unified Solitude of the Desert Fathers. *Parabola*](#). Summer 1989. Page 27.

What is important for us, however, is that the baptismal water represents the matter of the cosmos, the world as life of man. And its blessing at the beginning of the baptismal rite acquires thus a truly cosmic and redemptive significance. God created the world and blessed it and gave it to man as his food and life, as the means of communion with Him. The blessing of water signifies the return or redemption of matter to this initial and essential meaning. By accepting the baptism of John, Christ sanctified the water – made it the water of purification and reconciliation with God. It was then, as Christ was coming out of the water, that the Epiphany – the new and redemptive manifestation of God – took place, and the Spirit of God, who at the beginning of creation "moved upon the face of the waters," made water – that is, the world – again into what He made it at the beginning. Schmemmann, Alexander. [For the Life of the World](#). NY. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1998. Pages 72-3.

It was not forgiveness so much as the dramatic once-for-all conversion which John's baptism symbolized which was new.

--William Loader

Perhaps Christians need to say something different to their children. "My child, the world is always a dangerous and threatening place where death surrounds us. When I brought you for baptism I acknowledged that I could not possibly guarantee your future. I handed you over to the God who loves you and with whom you are safe in both life and death. There is no security to be found elsewhere, certainly not from me or those like me. Live with courage, therefore, and, if it must be, do not be afraid to die in the service of what is good and just." Meilaender, Gilbert. [After September 11](#). Christian Century 9/36-10/3, 2001 Pg. 8.

Lk. 3.1–6: John the Baptist (Mt 3.1–6; Mk 1.2–6). See also Ant. 18.5.2. Some scholars believe the original version of Luke's Gospel began here (see Introduction and compare Mk 1). 1: Tiberius ruled 14–37 ce. Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (26–36 ce). Herod Antipas (see 23.6–7) ruled Galilee and Perea (4 bce–29 ce). Philip, ruled 4 bce–34 ce; see 3.19–20. Lysanias, Roman tetrarch of Abilene (west of Damascus), ca. 25–30 ce. 2: Annas, high priest 6–15 ce when deposed by Rome. He was

succeeded by his sons, then his son-in-law Caiaphas (18–36 ce). On dating by reigning powers, see e.g. Isa 6.1; Jer 1.1–3; Ezek 1.1–3. Zechariah, 1.5–23, 59–80. Wilderness, 1.80n. 3: Baptism, from a Gk term meaning “dip,” ritual immersion in water. Unlike “miqveh” immersion for ritual purity, John’s baptism was apparently a singular event. For washing as symbolizing God’s cleansing, see e.g., Ezek 36.25; Ps 51.2; for the renunciation of evil see Isa 1.16. Josephus (Ant. 18.117) states that John’s baptism did not wash away sins; rather, it served as public testimony of repentance. For IQS 5.7–15, immersion functions as a rite of initiation; there is no evidence of John’s connection to the Qumran community. “Jewish proselyte baptism” (i.e., immersion as part of the ritual of conversion to Judaism) appears to be a post-70s practice (b. Yebam. 46a). For immersion prior to offering sacrifice, see m. Pesah. 8.8. 4–6: Isa 40.3–5 (see also IQS 8.12–16). For Isaiah, salvation was Israel’s return from Babylonian exile to its homeland (“A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness, prepare . . .’”); however, cantillation marks (for chanting the text in the synagogue) place “in the wilderness” with “prepare the way.” See also Mal 3.1. Pg. 104. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

This period of rapid shift in western society marks the beginning of the arising of what we might call metaphorically "imaginal cells" of the emerging "societal butterfly." Imaginal cells are what appear when the process of metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly occurs. As the body of the caterpillar begins to "break down," the "image" and structure of the newly emerging butterfly begins to form as imaginal "discs." At first the immune system of the caterpillar attacks these new discs as if they are foreign, but eventually the replication of these discs increases until the immune system breaks down and the new imaginal cells emerge and form themselves into a new pattern—the butterfly. This is a useful analogy for what is occurring in society as the old structures break down and the new patterns begin to emerge. But the new pattern is not yet fully formed and there are as yet no "new wineskins for the new wine."

Life only demands from you the strength you possess. Only one feat is possible – not to have run away. [Hammar skjold](#)

"I would rather lose, in a cause that will someday win, than win in a cause that will someday lose!" Woodrow Wilson

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. Anais Nin

Are we hesitating to respond to Christ this Advent because we are waiting for just the right moment, those perfect circumstances that will allow us to be just as quick as Andrew? Sadly, we may discover that while we were waiting for that illusive moment, we failed to be attentive to the here and now invitations of everyday life, missing opportunities to respond with the generosity of a true follower of Christ. - Priscilla Marck, "The Magnificat Advent Collection"

The decision to persevere prepares us for the answer to the Advent question: Why did it take the Incarnation to save us? It is because in order to persevere we needed both a reason and a model for this change. [Fr. Jonah Wharff](#)

SELECTED READINGS:

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B. 2009. Pgs/. 5-9.

William R. White. [Stories for the Journey](#) Augsburg Pub. House, Minneapolis, MN. 1988. A SPECIAL STORYTELLER: Page 33.

Ann Weems. [Kneeling in Bethlehem](#) Westminster Press, Philadelphia. 1980. YESTERDAY’S PAIN. Pg. 14.