

December 5, 2021
2nd Sunday of Advent
Luke 3:1-6

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

John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 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. 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, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Background:

The first two verses of the gospel text ground the gospel in the civil and religious history of the day. Luke states that the events he records took place at a particular time in the events of the world. Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias and even Annas and Caiaphas were powerful leaders who ruled with force rather than compassion. By naming these powerful figures of religious and civil authority Luke has deliberately placed John's ministry (and Jesus') within the context of world events.

Luke also includes details that place these events in the context of the community's understanding of themselves as the chosen people of God. Naming the Jordan River as the place where John was baptizing would link John's baptism with their ancestors' wandering in the desert. The Jordan River was crossed as they entered the Promised Land, and it became a symbol of their entrance to a new life. Luke also reminds his community that John is the son of Zechariah and therefore a member of the priestly family, which is typically associated with the temple in Jerusalem. To find John in the desert baptizing would have been an oddity and raised curiosity.

While the ritual of baptizing that John used is not described, it is understood that it was an expression of repentance or conversion. In this context, the Jordan River serves as the symbol of preparing for a new way of living. This new way of living is given an eschatological character, which is reinforced by reference to the prophet Isaiah. The prophet describes the glorious coming of the Lord when he will be revealed to all. "A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley." (Isaiah 40:1-4)

Although these events took place in a remote and unimportant part of the world, Luke suggests that these events have a significance beyond what is apparent. They will impact all people and all of creation.

Reflection Questions:

1. If you had to write the story of your beginning modeled after how Luke has described the beginning of John's ministry in the desert, how would it begin?
2. What do you remember of any events around the time of your birth that were significant for your family, the church, the country, or the world?
3. Who have been the perfect people, in just the right place at just the right time, in your life? What was it about them, and you, and the circumstances, that led them to be significant figures in your life?
4. Have there been times when you found the sacrament of Reconciliation or a moment of conversion was particularly powerful for you?
5. Are there people you find it difficult to forgive?

6. Do you know people who are burdened by past events, who find it difficult to forgive themselves?
7. The text says John came to preach forgiveness of sins, to prepare the way of the Lord. Why do you think that is?
8. Can you speak with God now about what this gospel passage is saying to you today, or how waiting might be an instrument of God's desire?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for December 5, 2021, the Second Sunday of Advent

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever: wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the mitre that displays the glory of the eternal name. For God will show all the earth your splendor: you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship. Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. Led away on foot by their enemies they left you: but God will bring them back to you borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones. For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God. The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God's command; for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company.

The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.
When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.
Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the torrents in the southern desert.
Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown,
those who sow in tears shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

Brothers and sisters: I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work

in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. God is my witness, I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. This is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

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

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Excerpts from Baruch 5:1-9; Psalm 126:1-6; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; and Luke 3:1-6

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for December 5th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. Like last week, the gospel from Luke continues in the Advent mode of being prepared for the Lord's coming, and again the specifics are not about preparing for the birth of Jesus. This gospel focuses on the message proclaimed by John the Baptist, as foretold by Isaiah: "A voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord! Every valley shall be filled, every mountain made low. All shall see his salvation.'"

The other readings also make reference to the way being made straight, restoration, and a joyful time at the Lord's coming. In the first reading, Baruch says, "Jerusalem, God will bring your children back. He has commanded every mountain be made low, every gorge filled, that Israel may advance in the glory of God." Psalm 126 proclaims, "When the Lord brought back the captives, our tongues were filled with rejoicing. Restore our fortunes, O Lord. The Lord has done great things." In the second reading, from Philippians, Paul writes, "I pray always with joy for all of you. The one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it, until the day of Christ Jesus."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

*God is leading his people in joy by the light of his glory,
with his mercy and justice accompanying him.*

Baruch 5:9