

December 8, 2024
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 this Gospel ground the Gospel in both the civil and religious history. Luke places the events he records where they took place, at their particular time in the events of the world. Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias and even Annas and Caiaphas were powerful leaders in their world, who ruled with force rather than compassion. By naming them, Luke has 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 as the chosen people of God. Naming the Jordan River as the place where John was baptizing would link his 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 be an oddity and raise curiosity.

While the ritual John used in baptizing is not described, it is understood as an expression of repentance or conversion. In this context, the Jordan River carries 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. What do you know about the world, the country, and your community when you were born? How did that impact the way you were raised and the person you are today?
2. Who were the significant people of your early life? How did their presence in your life impact you?
3. Have there been times in your life when you purposely made a change in your life? What do you remember about those moments? What impact has that had on the person you are today?
4. Do you know people who are burdened by past events, who find it difficult to forgive themselves or others? Is that something you have had to deal with in your own life?
5. The text says John came to preach forgiveness of sins, to prepare the way of the Lord. Why? Where do you experience the need to forgive as a necessary path to experiencing God's presence in your own life?
6. 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 fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@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 8, 2024, 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 miter 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.

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."

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

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for December 8th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. On this Second Sunday of Advent, the gospel, from Luke, is first about John the Baptist, and then about his message, foreshadowed in an Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah. "The word of God came to John in the desert. He went throughout the region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of Isaiah: 'A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord. The rough ways shall be made smooth, and all shall see the salvation of God."'"

The other readings have additional references about preparing for Jesus to come, and rejoicing in the great things the Lord does, restoring his people. In the first reading from Baruch, Jerusalem is told, "See your children gathered at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory. Psalm 126 exclaims, "When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming, our tongue filled with rejoicing. The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed." In the second reading, from the letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "The one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. May your love increase ever more, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ."

The long first reading from Baruch has room for a couple more connections with other readings. Jerusalem is told in Baruch, "Take off your robe of mourning and misery. Led away on foot by their enemies, your children left you: but God will bring them back to you rejoicing, borne aloft in glory." There is a parallel where Psalm 125 says, "Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

Jerusalem is told in Baruch, "Wrap in the cloak of justice from God; God is leading Israel in joy, with his mercy and justice for company." The Philippians are told in the second reading, "Be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. Baruch says, "God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that depths and gorges be filled, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God." Luke's Gospel quotes Isaiah saying, "Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Joe

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