

**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?

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