



Luke 3:1-6

1 In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the land of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, **2** during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. **3** He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, **4** as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. **5** Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth. **6** And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.'

Other readings: Baruch 5:1-9 Psalm 125 Philippians 1:3-6.8-11

One of the great characters of the Advent season is John the Baptist, the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus. Later in this gospel Jesus will say: 'Of all the children born of women there is no one greater than John, yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he is.' (Luke 7:28) John is truly a great man, but what Jesus will bring will be greater. Our gospel reading this Sunday is from the third chapter of Luke's gospel. Luke has already given an account of John's birth earlier in the gospel. Now Luke introduces the adult John and describes his ministry.

Luke provides an extraordinarily detailed list of the public officials who were in office when John and Jesus began their work. The names of Pontius Pilate and of Herod the tetrarch are easily recognised here. Luke demonstrates that John the Baptist and Jesus enter into the real world of history, a world in which power and position dominate events.

John's work is to travel around the region near the Jordan river, proclaiming 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. With his baptism John challenges the people to a new start, a change of heart, and to seek the forgiveness of God. If they respond, they will be ready to welcome the Messiah.

At the end of this gospel passage the evangelist gives a lengthy quotation from the book of Isaiah, which Christians consider to have been fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah. We have come to identify the voice in the wilderness with the voice of John. The whole of creation is described as getting ready for the coming of the Lord. Finally, 'all mankind shall see the salvation of God'. Luke makes clear that the Messiah comes to offer salvation to all nations.

How does the preaching of John the Baptist speak to me today?

Do I welcome the coming of Christ as a gift for all the people of the earth?

Pray for the wisdom to see that God still cares for the real world of our day.

Pray for the zeal of John the Baptist to bear witness to Christ as he did.