

Reading Luke in Lent

Gospel of Luke 3:1-20

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

- ¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,
Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch
of Galilee,
and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis,
and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,
- ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,
the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.
- ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,
“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
- ⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”
- ⁶ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptised by him,
“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
- ⁷ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves,
“We have Abraham as our father.” For I tell you,
God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.
- ⁸ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.
Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’
- ⁹ And the crowds asked him,
“What then shall we do?”
- ¹⁰ And he answered them,
“Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none,
and whoever has food is to do likewise.’
- ¹¹ Tax collectors also came to be baptised and said to him,
“Teacher, what shall we do?”
- ¹² And he said to them,
“Collect no more than you are authorized to do.’
- ¹³ Soldiers also asked him,
“And we, what shall we do?”
- ¹⁴ And he said to them,
“Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation,
and be content with your wages.’
- ¹⁵ As the people were in expectation,
and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ,



¹⁶ John answered them all, saying,
‘I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming,
the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.
He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand,
to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn,
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’
¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.
¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias,
his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done,
²⁰ added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

Reflection

Just as at the beginning of his Gospel Luke gives the historical context for this new stage in the story. The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (the successor to Augustus) was AD 28–29. John the Baptist is portrayed as an Old Testament prophet to whom the word of God is given when the time is right. He is described in the words of Isaiah as someone who prepares the way of the Lord. The preaching of John the Baptist is about repentance and in the dialogue which follows he shows that this about not taking what is not yours to have — one of the things he reproves Herod for. Speaking the truth to power has its dangers.

- Where are the crooked paths in our own lives that we need the Lord to straighten?
- How do we think John the Baptist might answer us if we asked him ‘What shall we do?’

Prayer

God of our salvation,
you straighten the winding ways of our hearts
and smooth the paths made rough by sin.

Make our conduct blameless,
keep our hearts watchful in holiness,
and bring to perfection the good you have begun in us.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near:
your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.