

Luke 3:1-6

In the 15th 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 Albilene, 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.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection Questions

- 1) **Context:** (verses 1 & 2 of Chp.3) Luke, the historian gives us the historical context for John the Baptist's ministry. Luke has already told us (1:5) that Herod was King of Judea when Zechariah was a priest and mentions that Augustus and Quirinius were emperors during the time of Jesus' entrance into the world. Emperor Tiberius's reign directly follows the reign of Augustus Caesar and places John's ministry as early as 26 AD. After the death of Herod the Great, Herod's kingdom was divided into four 'tetrarchies' (tetra meaning four), Herod Antipas, one of Herod the Great's sons ruled Galilee.

- 2) The mention of the two chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas, is a source of curiosity here because, according to Jewish custom, only one chief priest should be ruling in a particular region at a time. The mention of these two chief priests can be seen as a foreshadowing (for us today, who have access to all four gospels) of Jesus' trial, where both chief priests are present but one is using and being used by the Romans to undermine the authority of the other (John chp 18) in order to pave the way for His death. Even at the beginning of Jesus' life we are given haunting reminders of the violent end of His life. How does the knowledge of some of the historical context help you to understand the layers of the power games that surrounded the Son of God's entire life on this earth? In what ways do certain worldly powers and worldly agendas continue to try to suppress the breaking in of the Kingdom of God all around us?

- 3) The word of God comes to John in the wilderness. In what ways are we more disposed to hear the Word of God in our own 'wildernesses' (e.g. quiet time...reflective time...)? Unlike those who have received formal theological training (e.g. the Chief Priests), John is a character who is in stark contrast to them because of his rough clothing and dramatically direct ways of preaching the message. This passage reminds us that God chooses some of the most unlikely characters through whom He desires to speak. When has God used an 'unlikely character' to speak His Truth and Love to your heart?

- 4) The passage tells us that John went into all the regions around Jordan in order to proclaim the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This proclamation was for **all** people not just the Jewish people. Earlier in this gospel, Luke tells us that John would 'turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.'" (Lk. 1:6). The prophecy is fulfilled as John reminds everyone that all people have sinned and are in need of repentance. The process of being forgiven includes identifying (and admitting) the sin, having true contrition for the sin, asking for

forgiveness and then receiving the forgiveness from the Lord; steps which are outlined in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. All of the steps (in some form) are needed for the true healing of sin. What aspects of our culture encourage us to gloss over certain steps? How is that not helpful to our deepest healing in Christ?

- 5) John is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The formational years of John's life were spent in the desert with the Essene community where he learned prayer and purification rituals. He spent most of his life learning how to tune into the voice of the Lord. The term prophet means 'one who speaks on behalf of God.' How does John's profound listening to the Lord throughout his life make him a powerful and believable mouth-piece for the Lord later?
- 6) John calls people to 'prepare the way of the Lord.' Every King in that day and age would have sent an entourage ahead of himself to let everyone know that he was coming and work crews would be set up to repair the roads. John was that person for Christ's first coming; we are those people for His Second Coming. In what ways does God's Spirit in the Advent Season call us to be more attentive to those signs that will show us how we are to prepare to receive Christ, our Royal Guest? How are we being called to share Christ's arrival with others? How are we being called to make the "roads to our hearts" smooth so that Christ can more easily travel there?
- 7) "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." Luke was a Gentile and often makes positive references to the gentiles. Luke takes a moment here to remind all people that Christ's salvation is offered to ALL (not just to the Jews). In what way do we as Catholic Christians help others know (in a loving way) that Christ's salvation is lovingly and freely offered to ALL?