

# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

8th December 2024

**Luke 3:1** In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, <sup>4</sup> as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;  
<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Luke begins his account of the ministry of Jesus by putting it in its historic context. He tells us who was in charge in the worlds of politics and religion and then introduces us to someone who was a threat to them both.

John the Baptist is presented as inviting the people to repent, to turn again to God and to show their desire to do this by being baptised - a symbolic washing. In doing so John is seen as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah in which there is a call to remove every obstacle that might stand in the way of God showing his salvation to his people. The gospel reminds us of one of the key themes of Advent repent.

The readings of this Sunday show us the true meaning of repentance, for they speak about leaving aside anything that might blind us to what God wants for us, and opening ourselves to something new and wonderful and beyond our wildest dreams: God coming to us in the person of his Son, Jesus.

### SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year C

#### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

John the Baptist is the quintessential Advent figure in the Christian tradition, preparing us even today for the arrival of Jesus. This gospel passage (together with next Sunday's) provides us with his basic teaching. The Isaiah citation marks John out as someone who prepares for someone else. John was immensely significant—to an uncomfortable degree it would seem—for early Christianity. (His followers continue to exist today the Mandaean.) Jesus had been a disciple of John and, as such, had accepted his baptism. Jesus' own ministry started from the moment his mentor could no longer function. Finally, Jesus' initial proclamation resembled that of John himself. In other words, John the Baptist was essential for the Jesus story and for that very reason each Gospel needed to locate him as somehow preparatory or secondary.

#### Thought for the day

The feats of engineering hinted at in the citations from Isaiah may seem physically daunting but are even more of a challenge on the intended spiritual level. The highway is for our God— and we could ask what in me impedes his way, how do I block the arrival of the Lord in my life? More positively, I could ask myself what do I do so that the Gospel may come alive in my life? With such cooperation from me, the Lord can and will bring to completion what he has begun.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA—[www.tarsus.ie](http://www.tarsus.ie)

## General Comments

On the second and third Sundays of Advent, the church gives us John the Baptist as a model of someone who knows how to wait. In this first passage we have Luke's summary of the mission of John the Baptist. It is none other than the mission of Jesus himself and of all preachers of the gospel.

In verses 1 and 2 St Luke invites us to meditate on God's word which comes to John in the wilderness, bypassing the powerful ones of the world.

Verse 3 is a concise summary of John's (and Jesus') preaching.

There are two aspects to verses 4 and 5: the fact that John lived out the vocation of Isaiah, and then the content of his preaching expressed in poetic language. We are invited to identify with both aspects.

## Scripture prayer

"We live in a world where no one cares." *School principal, The Trinidad Express, 10 November 1991*

Lord, we pray that in our heartless world the church may, like John the Baptist,

fulfil what is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah,

and be a voice crying out to those who feel themselves in a wilderness

that you have not abandoned them, that every valley will be filled in,

every mountain and hill laid low,

winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth.

## MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

"What Jesus never said:

'Feed the hungry only if they have papers'; 'Clothe the naked only if they're from your country'; Welcome the stranger only if there's zero risk;' 'Help the poor only if it's convenient'; 'Love your neighbour only if they look like you'." James Martin SJ quoted in

**TRIONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—The Deep End**

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The manner in which Luke identifies in detail the time when John the Baptist started his preaching shows that Luke regarded this as a historic moment. Perhaps you can recall in detail the time and the circumstances of particularly significant moments in your life?
2. John called people to give expression to their desire for a change of heart by a symbolic baptism in the Jordan. When have you found it helpful to symbolise your desire to change for the better by some symbolic gesture, e.g., burning a packet of cigarettes, sending a card, making a phone call, etc.
3. 'A voice crying in the wilderness' is sometimes taken to refer to a voice that is ignored. Pope Francis has issued a call to all of us to take part in the consultation process preparing for the Synod in 2023. What can you, and your faith community, do to make sure his call is answered.

The decisive event of Jesus takes place outside the sphere of influence of religious and political leaders. That is the way what is essential in our world and in our lives always happens. It is how salvation and the grace of God enter human history. What is essential is not in the hands of those who hold power. Luke puts it tersely: "The word of God came to John in the desert", not to imperial Rome, nor to the temple precincts in Jerusalem.

Nowhere else than in the desert can one hear the call of God to change the world. The desert is the realm of the truth, the place where one lives on essentials. There is no room for the superfluous. You cannot keep accumulating things that are not needed. Luxury and ostentation are inconceivable. It is crucial here to find the correct way to live.

The desert is a symbol of a simple life, better rooted in what matters, still undistorted by infidelity to God and by all the injustice done to people. How are we today responding to the call "Prepare the way of the Lord."

The images from the prophet Isaiah invite us to make basic, fundamental decisions:

- Secure the essentials undistracted by what is less important
- Make right what we as a society have been deforming
- Face the reality of our lives to recover a readiness for conversion
- We need in the first place, a *baptism of conversion*.

## JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus