

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Preparation

December 2022

Fall Quarter

December 17, 2022

Lesson #3 – John the Baptist Appears

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Luke 3:2b-6, 15-18

ICE BREAKERS-

1. In what ways does John's life teach us about humility?
2. How can you be attentive to God's Word when you feel like you are in the wilderness because of life's challenges?
3. How can you incorporate the practice of repentance into your daily rhythms?

Key Verse: "He came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."—Luke 3:3

LESSON BACKGROUND –

All four Gospels tell the story of John the Baptist, a forerunner of Jesus (Matthew 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 1:5–25, 57–66; John 1:19–34; 3:22–36). We take care not to confuse him with the John who wrote the Gospel that bears that name.

The Gospels describe John the Baptist and his preaching as coming in the type of the prophet Elias (that is, Elijah; see Matthew 11:13–14; 17:11–13; Mark 9:11–13; Luke 1:17; compare John 1:21–27). John came as the last prophet of Israel. As such, his task was to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17, lesson 1; compare Malachi 4:5–6).

John spent his formative years in the wilderness (Luke 1:80). Some students of the New Testament propose that while in the wilderness John interacted with a Jewish sect known as the Essenes. Unlike the parties of the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament. However, historians of the first century AD, including Josephus, attest to their existence and ascetic practices. Though similarities exist between the practices of the Essenes and those of John, Scripture is silent regarding any association that John may have had with that group.

John's birth is described in Luke 1:57–66 (see lesson 2). After pausing to tell of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2), Luke reintroduces his audience to John. He does so by setting the context of John's public ministry within the political and religious context of the day (see 3:1–2a). Luke mentions, among others, Tiberius Caesar (Roman emperor, AD 14–37), Pontius Pilate (governor of Judaea, AD 26–36),

Herod Antipas (tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, 4 BC–AD 39), and two high priests (variously served, AD 7–36). Luke states that the narrative of John the Baptist in today's text occurred in the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (3:1), which dates to either AD 28 or 29.

Luke's references to these leaders do more than merely establish a time frame for events recorded in his Gospel. The inclusion of these rulers reminds Luke's intended audience (which may be primarily Gentile in background) that the Jewish people of this time lived under foreign Roman occupation. They were waiting for a savior who would free them from foreign occupation (compare Luke 24:21; John 6:15; Acts 1:6). John, however, came into this context preaching a message of a different sort of salvation. Matthew 3:1–2, 11–12; Mark 1:4–8; and John 1:24–28 are parallel to the two segments of today's text.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Preparation by the Forerunner: John the Baptist (3:1–20)

3:1–20. Luke began the description of John's ministry by identifying the political and religious leaders of the day (3:1–2), once again tying the history of Jesus to the history of the wider world. John is identified as the **son of Zacharias** (3:2)—the same person from the earlier narrative (cf. 1:5–24, 57–80). He is the one to whom **the word of God came**, identifying him as a prophet. John is also identified by his message of **baptism of repentance** (3:3) and as the fulfillment of the prophecy of **Isaiah** (3:4–6; Is 40:3–5). His message was geared to the people who came to hear him. To the curious (Lk 3:7), to the presumptuous (3:8), and to the complacent (3:9) he preached a message of warning and repentance. To those who did repent (crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers who said **what shall we do?** in 3:10, 12, 14a), he gave practical advice to show the **fruits of repentance** (3:8). To those looking for the Messiah he pointed away from himself to One who was **mightier than** he was (3:16). John's ministry aroused the opposition of Herod, who had him imprisoned (3:18–20). John the Baptist epitomized faithful preaching, Christ focused ministry, and boldness in the face of opposition.

LESSON NUGGET – John was privileged to prepare the nation for the Messiah and then present Him to them. John preached against sin and told the people to repent. He gave specific instructions to his converts on how to put their faith into practice. He was inspecting fruit (v.8), getting to the root of sin (v.9), and warning about wrath to come (vv.7,17). Would you accept that kind of ministry?

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary