



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

Chapter 3

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Introduction

Chapter Outline

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- St. John Preaches to the People 3:7-20
- St. John Baptizes our Lord Jesus Christ 3:21-22
- The Genealogy of Jesus Christ 3:23-38



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- The opening of the main narrative is characteristic of St. Luke's as he carefully set the work of John in historical context
- He names the rulers of any regions that were affected, directly or indirectly, by the events which he narrates
- He first situates the beginning of St. John the Baptist's ministry during the reign of the political leaders and then during the rule of the religious leaders
- *Tiberius Caesar*, He had succeeded Augustus 14 A.D., so that we get the date 29 A.D. for the commencement of the St. John the Baptist's ministry



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- *Pontius Pilate*, He had entered on his office in 26 AD and was the Roman commander of Judea, Samaria and Idumaea from 26-36 AD
- *Herod*, This was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who murdered the innocents of Bethlehem, beheaded John the Baptist, and to whom our Lord was sent by Pilate
- Judah was divided into four regions
- *Tetrarch*, The word means a ruler of a *fourth part* of a country and it was later applied to the rule of a subordinate prince, as in the case of Herod's younger sons Herod Antipas and Herod Philip



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- Abilene was a territory northwest of Damascus ruled by an ally of Rome named Lysanias
- St. Luke also situates St. John's ministry during the reign of Judea's religious leaders the High Priest Annas and his son-in-law Joseph Caiaphas
- *in the wilderness*, Where he had been brought up and lived, and from where he came, preaching
- John began to fulfill his ultimate calling; to be a forerunner of the Messiah



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- He had lived a solitary life, and did not learn his doctrine from men, but had his mission, ministry, and baptism, from heaven
- The reputation of John probably preceded the Divine call
- His family - the son of a well-known priestly family; the marvelous circumstances attendant on his birth, his ascetic manner of life from the beginning; all this had contributed to make him very distinguished
- So, when he left his solitude, we read in the other gospels how multitudes came forth to hear the extraordinary fiery and powerful words, the Divine eloquence of one long looked upon by the people as set apart for a great work



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- *baptism of repentance*: There was nothing strange in the ceremony of baptism itself
- The strange thing was that *Jews* submitted to baptism
- This was a common ritual for Gentiles who wanted to become Jews
- For a Jew to submit to baptism was to say something like, “I’m as bad as a heathen Gentile”
- This was a true mark of humble repentance, a radical rededication to the Lord
- It is calling sinners of all descriptions to repentance by confessing their sins, and permitting the repentant to the baptism



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- John's message was a call to repentance
- Some people think that repentance is mostly about *feelings*, especially feeling sorry for your sin
- It is wonderful to feel sorry about your sin, but repent isn't a "feelings" word
- It is an *action* word
- John told his listeners to make a change of the mind, not merely to feel sorry for what they had done
- Repent in Greek means change of mind and purpose and implying pity and regret, Wisdom 5:3 not a sorrow in the heart



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- He seems to have principally preached and taught in the Jordan valley
- No doubt for the convenience of his candidates for baptism
- But he evidently did not confine his preaching to one spot or even to one neighborhood
- The district here alluded to was about a hundred and fifty miles in length
- The expectation of Messiah for centuries had been the root of all true life in Israel
- John's ministry was to proclaim repentance and baptism in preparation for the coming of the Messiah



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- St. Luke further emphasizes the nature of John's divine call by quoting from the book of Isaiah 40:3-5, a passage quoted in part by the other Gospel writers, Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3 and John 1:23
- All the Gospel writers quote only Isaiah 40:3 relating to St. John's ministry
- John is here set out as a forerunner to Christ, to prepare His way, to fill up ditches, throw down hills, to make rough ways smooth, and every path to prepare the way for Him



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- The image is a simple one, and in the East one well knows when Kings and great princes are coming (especially with armies) they usually have some coming before them, as pioneers or forerunners, to prepare their way, by levelling rough places, and removing whatsoever is in the way of their pathways, and filling up holes and ditches
- Usually these kings are not far off when once their pioneers are seen coming
- He awoke men's sleeping consciences



St. John the Baptist Prepares the Way 3:1-6

- *all flesh shall see the salvation of God*, And as princes that have wildernesses to pass through have more need of their pioneers to prepare and smooth their ways; so the state of the Jews being now confused, as a wilderness, and corrupt above measure, John the Baptist was sent before to cry in the wilderness
- And when this preparation is complete, then shall Messiah publicly appear
- And the Baptist faithfully performed his work as pioneer of the Christ
- His message of warning prepared the hearts at least of the crowds who gathered round Jesus as He preached

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- The coming of the multitudes in great numbers did not please John the Baptist and he did not consider it as a success of mission because his baptism has to be based on a practical repentance that comes from true faith
- Addressing people as a *Brood of vipers* is not a customary way to begin a sermon
- But John wasn't interested in preaching a soft message or in *itching ears*
- The viper, to which he compares them, is the worst and most dangerous of serpents

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- He may have meant by “vipers” here that their love of harming others, for the serpent is venomous and fatal to man
- And he may also meant to describe the venomous hypocrisy which turned religion itself into evil, and hid a deadly malice under the splendid appearance of a zeal for orthodoxy
- The metaphor was one of those desert symbols which would be suggested to St. John both by the scene of his preaching and by the language of Isaiah with which he shows special familiarity

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- *Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?* The Jews had been taught by Prophecy that the Advent of their Deliverer should be preceded by a time of anguish which they called “the Woes of the Messiah;” In Malachi, *“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap”* (Malachi 3:2)
- Such prophecies received their primary fulfilment at the Destruction of Jerusalem, Matthew 24; Mark 13:19-20; and await their final fulfilment hereafter, Revelation 6:16

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- John the Baptist did not stop at preaching repentance, and rest satisfied with the people's making a profession thereafter, but he insisted on the necessity of their bringing forth fruits suitable to such a profession, or a thorough reformation of their conduct in all respects
- The drift of all John's sermons was to root out their prejudices, and give them a sense of this important truth, that true repentance will always have fruit
- The basic fruit of the Christian life is love Galatians 5:22 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- *We have Abraham as our father*, These words show that John had great courage to strike boldly at the very root of Jewish pride
- They had so exalted a concept of this privilege, John 8:39, that they could barely believe it possible that any son of Abraham should ever be lost
- One must not trust not in being a member of a visible church, or in any external privileges whatsoever; for God requires a change of heart, and that *now*, without delay
- John's point in saying that God can raise up children to Abraham from the stones is the same point Jesus makes in John 8:33-39

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- True sons of Abraham would behave as Abraham did
- The Jews do not behave as sons/children of Abraham because they do not believe that the Messiah is coming and now is the time to submit their lives to God
- *these stones*, It may also signify the Gentiles for they were stones due to their hard hearts
- *now the ax is laid to the root of the trees*, That is, the patience of God is very near come to an end, with respect to you
- And His judgments are at hand and ready to be put forth; so that if you continue unfruitful, despite the extraordinary means now to be tried with you, destruction will speedily overtake you

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- John preaching God's warnings has this effect upon the people, they ask him, *What shall we do then?*
- They demonstrated genuine repentance
- John had told them to bring forth fruits appropriate to repentance, or to lead a life which showed that their repentance was genuine
- They need to demonstrate their repentance by righteous living according to God's Law and righteous deeds in treating their fellowman/woman with mercy, respect and justice

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- John the Baptist gave only one answer that is appropriate for all
- Mercy is a general virtue, and is the essential principle to follow and practiced by all
- *He who has two tunics*, Selfishness was the root of evil
- It was to be conquered not by religious emotions only, but by acts of unselfishness
- This advice is simple and practical
- The whole teaching of this eminent man of God was thoroughly practical

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- The Romans taxed by auctioning the rights to collect taxes to the highest bidder
- Because the tax collector could only cover his costs and make a profit by getting as much as he could, these men were hated intensely
- *tax collectors* were convinced under John's ministry of the evils of their life and they desired to be baptized, so they asked, *what shall we do* to escape divine punishment?
- John did not see tax collecting as inherently evil
- He did not command them to quit their professions, but to conduct themselves honestly

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- *the soldiers*, Whose soldiers is not clear
- Some think these were Gentile soldiers, since it does not look so likely that the Romans would employ Jews as soldiers in their own country
- However, it is more probable that they were Jews, in the pay of the Romans, who belonged to Herod, governor of Galilee, or to Philip of Ituraea, whose dominions lay near the place where John was
- Some of these also come to hear John the Baptist preach
- Hearing him press repentance, and bringing forth fruits that might testify the truth of it, they ask what they should do

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- They were commanded to exhibit attitudes of restraint, truthfulness, and contentment
- The temptation of soldiers, strong in their solidarity, was to terrify the poor by violence, and undermine the rich by acting as informants
- It is remarkable that John the Baptist does not bid even soldiers to *abandon* their profession, but to serve God in it
- The lesson is clear, one may remain in the profession; if one will serve God in it
- What counts is the way in which the work is done

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- John's call to repentance through a ritual of water purification and his warnings of divine judgment for those who oppress the weak and disadvantaged probably reminded the people of the prophecies of the Messiah in the books of Ezekiel 36:25-28 and Malachi 3:2-5
- In addition, this reflects the widespread extraordinary success of John's preaching, and the wonderment on the part of many if, perhaps, this was indeed the Messiah
- Such impressions reached Jerusalem, as we read in John 1:24 that the Pharisees sent a delegation to ascertain the facts

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- To invalidate this growing conviction that he was the Messiah, John tells the people plainly Another far greater than he was coming
- He, John, certainly baptized those who came to him, but it was merely symbolical and could not purify them
- His work had been to stir them up to repentance, to arouse them to change their lives
- But the One who was coming, before whom he (John) was unworthy to stand and perform the humblest lowly task, that great One will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- The religious leaders of Jesus' day taught that a teacher might require just about anything of his followers *except* to have them take off his sandals
- That was considered too humiliating to demand
- Yet John said that he was not even worthy to do *this* for Jesus
- John had many reasons to be proud, yet he was humble
- He had a miraculous birth, a prophesied destiny, a man called to personally fulfill great prophetic promises, a powerful preacher, and a man with a great following

St. John Preaches to the People 3:7-20



- *with the Holy Spirit and fire*, It is literally fulfilled at the Pentecost after Jesus' Resurrection, Acts 2:1-14 and which is a fulfillment of the prophecy of the purifying and refining characteristics of the Messiah prophesied in Ezekiel 36:25-28 and Malachi 3:2-5
- Verse 17 repeats the divine judgment promised in verse 9
- A *winnowing fan* was a forklike instrument that was used to separate the wheat grains from the uneatable *chaff*
- The *threshing floor* was a flat area where the harvested grain was brought

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- The wheat was thrown into the air with the winnowing fork as the breeze blew away the chaff and the good wheat seeds fell to the ground
- The unwanted chaff was burned with fire and destroyed
- The symbolic imagery of *the winnowing fan*, *the threshing floor* and the burning of the unwanted chaff is a familiar Old and New Testament biblical image of judgment in separating the righteous from the wicked and as an image of the final destruction, Job 21:17-18; Isaiah 41:16; Jeremiah 15:7; Wisdom 5:14,23; Matthew 3:12, 13:30,40,42,50; Luke 3:17; John 15:6
- The Messiah has the authority to separate and judge the righteous from the wicked

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- *many other exhortations*, Relating to the Person and office of the Messiah, to the nature of His kingdom, the Gospel dispensation, and to faith in Him
- St. John pointed Him out to the people, and exhorted them to believe in Him, and expressed much joy and pleasure on the hearing of His success and increase
- *he preached to the people*, Spreading the Gospel, the good news, and glad tidings of the Messiah's being come, and of life, righteousness, and salvation by Him
- This verse concluded John's ministry

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- Luke gave only a brief summary of John's message, but it is sufficient
- Luke not pausing to recount the story of John's death; but there is a suggestion in this account which reveals Herod's treatment of John as the worst of all his crimes
- Verses 19-20 looks forward to John's arrest by Herod Antipas which later resulted in his death, Luke 9:7-9, all of which occurred after Jesus' baptism, Luke 3:21-22
- *Herod the tetrarch*, Was a son of Herod the first, and brother of Archelaus and he was the third king of the family of Herod

St. John Preaches to the People

3:7-20



- He was very wicked and he took the wife of his brother Philip, whilst he was alive, to himself as a wife
- John, the high priest, because he *rebuked* him for this, he slew him with the sword
- Because John made such a bold stand for the truth, Herod, who was immersed in immorality, punished him
- *also added this*, The Jews as well as St. Luke regarded the treatment of John the Baptist by Antipas as the worst of his crimes, and the cause of his subsequent defeat and disgrace

St. John Baptizes our Lord Jesus Christ 3:21-22



- This is the shortest account of the first three Gospels of this event
- Two circumstances related are, however, peculiar to St. Luke - the fact that He ascended "praying" from the water, and the opening words of this verse, which probably signify that on this day Jesus waited till the crowds had been baptized
- Christ did not confess sin, as others did, for He had none to confess; but He prayed and kept up communion with His Father
- The voice from heaven was pronounced while He was praying, or soon after, Luke 9:35; John 12:28

St. John Baptizes our Lord Jesus Christ 3:21-22



- The Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and there came a voice from heaven, from God the Father, from the excellent glory
- Thus was a proof of the Holy Trinity, of the Three Persons in the Godhead, given at the baptism of Jesus Christ
- By baptizing Jesus
- St. John the Baptist reveals the Messiah to Israel in a baptism of anointing by the Holy Spirit, John 1:31; Acts 10:37-38
- Jesus is "fulfilling all righteousness" by submitting Himself to the Father's divine will, Matthew 3:15

St. John Baptizes our Lord Jesus Christ 3:21-22



- Jesus accepts His mission as God's suffering servant by allowing Himself to be counted among the sinners John baptizes, just as He will be counted among sinners at His death, Luke 22:37; 23:32; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21
- In doing this Jesus is already anticipating the "baptism" of His bloody death on the altar of the Cross for the remission of our sins, Matthew 10:38-39; Acts 2:38, 10:43
- He is also demonstrating what those who accept Him as Lord and Savior must do to be joined to His baptism of death and resurrection unto salvation, Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38, 22:16

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

3:23-38



- *thirty years of age*, This was the age at which the Levites entered upon their work; the age, too, at which it was lawful for scribes to teach
- Generally speaking, thirty among the Jews was looked upon as the time of life when manhood had reached its full development
- *being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph*, Luke made it plain in the most obvious manner the fact that Joseph had no physical connection whatever with Jesus
- Throughout the ages, scholars have argued the reasons for the conflicting genealogies of Matthew and Luke, particularly since Jewish scribes were known for their precise and detailed record keeping

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

3:23-38



- However, here are just a few points:
- Matthew's list of the forefathers of Jesus showed that Jesus Christ was the son of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed, and heir to the throne of David
- But Luke shows that Jesus was the Seed of the woman that should *bruise* the serpent's head, and traces the line up to Adam, beginning with Heli, the father, not of Joseph, but of Mary
- So, Matthew uses a descending order of generations beginning with Abraham and ending with Jesus while Luke uses an ascending order beginning with Jesus and ending with Adam

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

3:23-38



- Some suggest that Luke's purpose in presenting a "regression" was to magnify attention on Jesus
- Matthew's genealogy is condensed and divided into three groups of 14, representing a movement through three time periods
- The first group lists the patriarchs, the second names the kings, and the third contains private citizens
- The intent was not to give a strict record, but rather, present the historical progression
- It begins by highlighting the family origin, then the rise to power through the Davidic throne, and eventually the decline from royalty to the humble birth of the promised Messiah

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

3:23-38



- Five noteworthy women are included in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary
- Their inclusion has been a source of continuous debate
- Jerome suggested that four of these women were included because they were sinners, foreshadowing Jesus as the Savior of sinful humans
- Others thought they were included because they were Gentiles, showing that the Messiah extended His blessings beyond Israel

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

3:23-38



- St. Ambrose says, “St. Luke did not mention the genealogy at the beginning, but rather after the baptism event. He wished to show that God is the Father of us all by the means of baptism.”
- The list of names ends thus, *the son of Adam, the son of God* that is, the offspring of God by creation
- Christ was both the son of Adam and the Son of God, that He might be a proper Mediator between God and the sons of Adam, and might bring the sons of Adam to be, through Him, the sons of God

Discussion



- Why would Luke name all these people in the first few verses? Some people say biblical writers never intended their records to be viewed as historic fact. How would you respond?
- What Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist?
- What practical examples of repentance did John use to help people who asked for direction?
- Some people today claim to have received John's baptism. What can we learn from Acts 19:1-6 about this?



Discussion

- Why did people emphasize having Abraham as their father? What was John's response?
- Who imprisoned John? Why? What can we learn about rebuking sin?
- What happened when Jesus was baptized?
- Whose ancestors did Luke list? Why?