

The Baptism of Jesus Luke 3:1-22

Scriptural Background/History

3:1 - AD25-26 - the general historical period noting those in power/ruling

3:2 - Annas with high priest AD6-15 deposed by Gratus, Roman official. The Jews continued to recognize his authority. Caiaphas succeeding Gratus and other sons. John's message from God came to him in the desert as other OT prophets. This is a desolate, inhabited area.

3:3 - Baptism of repentance - a change of heart, turning around 360' and includes sorrow for sin and a determination to lead a holy life according to John. Christ would deliver the repentant person from sin's penalty by dying on the cross.

3:4 - Before a king made a long journey to a distant country, the roads on his way would be improved. Preparation for the Messiah was made in a moral and spiritual way by the ministry of Jesus, focused on repentance, forgiveness of sin and the need for a Savior.

3:6 - God's salvation was to be made known to Jews and Gentiles, a major theme in Luke. This was unthinkable to Jewish leaders.

3:7 - "the coming wrath" refers to Jerusalem's destruction in AD70 and the final judgment.

3:9 - ax and tree - symbolic way of saying that judgment is near for those who give no evidence of repentance - fire represents judgment.

3:11 - two tunics - this was like a long undershirt. Since two such garments were not needed, the second should be given to someone in need.

3:12 - tax collectors - Romans collected taxes using Jewish agents, like Zacchaeus, detested by the public for helping the pagan rulers and defrauding their own people (Jews).

3:14 - soldiers - limited forces were allowed for certain Jewish rulers and institutions, like Herod, temple police, escorts for tax collectors. Unethical practices were condemned.

3:16 - this was fulfilled at Pentecost, Holy Spirit and fire is associated with judgment.

3:17 - winnowing forks separated wheat from chaff. Chaff was good for nothing. Chaff = unrepentant; Wheat = righteous. Many Jews thought only pagans would be judged but John said otherwise.

3:19 - rebuked Herod because of Herodias, his brother's wife, who Herod married after divorcing his own wife Aretas IV of Arabia. So, Herod married his niece instead.

3:20 - John was imprisoned in Machaerus east of the Dead Sea. This happened after Jesus began his ministry. In Luke 9:7-9 John's death is noted.

3:21 - baptized - Jesus was praying which only Luke notes. Luke emphasized Jesus at prayer often.

3:22 - when the Spirit descended in bodily form, for John this was a holy sign. Two other times the gospel writers denote a voice from heaven addressing Jesus: Mount of Transfiguration and in the temple area during Jesus' final week.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe John's message and style? Ever known anyone like this? How does it strike you? Why?
2. What is radical about this message? What do "root" and "fruit" signify? Is he advocating social revolution or inner transformation or both? Why would anyone go out to hear him preach?
3. How does John see Jesus and his ministry/calling? Do you see Jesus this way? Why or why not?
4. What sort of repentance is John calling for? Why? What is the outcome? What do you think of the image of judgment being fire?

5. Why do you think the people confused John with the Messiah?
6. Who has been “John the Baptist” in your life? In what ways?
7. If John were talking to you today, what would he say to you and why? If you took his message to heart, how would that change you?
8. What one action will you take this week to produce fruit in line with your repentance? In what area(s) of your life do you need to turn 180 degrees? How will this happen? What would it take for that to happen?
9. What is the significance of Jesus having John baptize him? Do you see any relationship between his baptism and your own? Why were you baptized? What does it signify? Is a new community created for all people?