

TEXT: Luke 3:15-20

THEME: PREPARE THE WAY

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (Luke 3:15-20)

Yes, indeed, Dr. Luke got it all exactly right, just as I said it and just what happened, but I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit, after all.



Oh, hello there! Good morning (evening) to you! Pardon my clothing, but this is what I always wear. The only thing I own is this camel hair tunic and the belt around my waist. It’s not my intention to draw attention to my clothing—or to myself, for that matter. I was called to be just a VOICE—a voice crying in the wilderness: “PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD.”

I am just a man named John, a man sent from God. I was not the Light that was coming into the world. I was called to bear witness to the Light. You know me best as John the Baptist.

My father, Zechariah, was a priest. I understand that you met him right here last week. I won’t repeat everything he told you about me. Just know that when I was little he taught me everything he told you. Because my parents were old when I was born, they didn’t live to see me grow up. When they died, my relatives helped me, caring for me and guiding me. I remember the times I was in Nazareth with my mother’s cousin, Mary, and her son, Jesus, who was six months younger than I.

I was thankful for my relatives, but I was most comfortable when I was alone. I often camped out in the desert country, even as a boy. I was alone, but I never felt really alone. I knew that the Lord was with me at all times.

At thirty years of age, when our Jewish society allowed men to begin to comment on the Scriptures read in the synagogues instead of just listening respectfully to their elders, I moved into the ministry for which I had been born, the ministry for which the Holy Spirit had filled me and shaped me.

I went into the desert area—hot, rough country—to begin my ministry. I must have been quite a sight—never having cut my hair, my skin darkened by the desert sun, wearing this rustic clothing. And my strong voice had been graveled by the desert winds.

I knew only that the King was coming, and that I was to prepare the way for him. It was time for God to assert his eternal rule in the hearts and lives of his people—and I knew that people would first have to be prepared. Something would have to turn them around. That was my job—to get them turned around and ready for the King.

There's no way I could have anticipated the crowds that I attracted. They came out to me—hundreds of them, thousands of them. Only the Holy Spirit could have produced those results. I became more convinced than ever: The Messiah was coming, the Great One, the Promised King was coming to establish his Kingdom—the Mighty One whose sandals I was unworthy to untie. “People of Judah!” I cried out. “You must turn your life around! Repent and believe! The Kingdom is at hand! Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance!”

My message never varied—not for anyone. Common people, Pharisees, and kings heard the same message. I spoke straight from the hip and my words went straight to the heart. When people asked me what they should do to be ready, I said, “Straighten up your act! Quit cheating. Stop being greedy and become liberal in your sharing and giving. Repent and believe—for the Kingdom is near at hand!”

I became aware of a problem. They kept asking me about me. Who was I? I was always afraid that they were making so much of me that they might miss my message—so I kept my testimony clear: “I am not the Christ. I am not the Messiah. I'm just a voice, just a herald in the wilderness crying, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!’”

Then one day, while I was preaching and baptizing, I saw him. I saw him—but not as my cousin, not as my childhood playmate, but as my Savior. It all came together in a moment of inspiration: He was the ONE—the Messiah, the Fulfiller of the covenant, the King of heaven and earth. I pointed to him and the Holy Spirit put new words on my lips: “**Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**” I wanted him to baptize me, but he insisted that he take his place alongside the others. He said that in this way he would “**fulfill all righteousness.**”

When I baptized Jesus I saw the heavens open above him. I saw the Spirit of God descend on him in the form of a dove. And I heard the Voice of God saying, “**This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.**” I saw and heard it all—and I testified that this Jesus of Nazareth is the very Son of God.

And that's it. He began his saving ministry, and I faded off the scene. My job was done, my mission accomplished. The King was here. So I began to decrease—and Jesus began to increase. That was God's will and plan for me and for him.

It wasn't long after that I found myself in Herod's prison. You see, I had publicly condemned Herod for his adultery. So he had me arrested and thrown into one of his dungeons. Those were dark days. But I remembered my father telling me of his Spirit-filled reaction when I was born to be the King's herald. He said he had praised God: **"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people."** I remembered, and I believed. And I was content, even in prison.

It was Herod's wife who finally did me in. In a moment of jealous rage at one of his wild parties, I became the focus of her hateful attention. She was responsible for having my head chopped off and presented to her on a platter. But it didn't matter. My work was done; my life was complete.

I understand that my voice is still the Advent Voice in Christian Churches. The message certainly has to be the same for every generation. Before Christmas comes, listen to me. If you want Christmas to really bless you, then "Repent! For the Kingdom is at hand! The King is coming! Prepare your hearts for him! Receive him again in faith! Turn your life around and serve him in love!"

I was the last of the prophets—and I had to stand "on tiptoe," as it were, to see the redemption in Christ. You, however, have 2,000 years of Christianity on which to build. You have prophecy and fulfillment. You have received grace upon grace.

I must go now. Listen, and you will hear the echo of my voice, the message still the same for you and yours—just as urgent and just as glorious. "Repent and believe! The Kingdom of God is here! The Kingdom of God is yours!" Amen.