

The Baptism of Jesus
 Luke 3:1-22
 Tampa Covenant Church
 12 January 2025

Proposition: As the forerunner to Christ, the ministry and message of John the Baptist serves as a model for our role in God's story.

FCF: Failure to live out our roles in God's story.

RHF: Jesus Christ is the beloved Son of God in whom the Father is well pleased; making him the sole mediator between God and man through his sinless life, sacrificial death, burial, resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand.

(#1) Series Introduction:

This morning we begin a new series in Luke's gospel entitled, "Stories of our Savior." This gospel is addressed to an individual named Theophilus (*Lover of God*). Tradition posits that Theophilus may have been a recent convert as well as an elite in society. But it's clear Luke also had a wider audience in view who may not have shared the same social rank as Theophilus but most likely shared his Gentile background.¹

So, what can we learn from this letter **(#2)written so long ago?** In Luke 1:3-4, Luke tells Theophilus he's writing an "orderly account" so that Theophilus (as well as other converts) may have certainty concerning the things he's been taught. This should be the defining mark of every Christian, living with certainty that the gospel is the truth of what God has done in Christ on their behalf and what he's presently doing in the world through the enabling power of the Spirit. All too often, the trials and ups and downs of life adversely affect the Christian's assurance in the divine plan of God for the future.

We live in a culture that promotes many alternatives to the Christian life and ignores the Christian faith as the source of a real, tangible hope in the divine plan of God for his world. Luke's gospel serves to ground the Christian in the fact that the gospel is the good news that centers on Christ, who is the savior and redeemer of the world. So, each week we'll unpack a story of our Savior and highlight how he reveals himself as the one who came to seek and save the lost through his person and work. And we'll see that he's the only one who possesses power over the created order, sin, sickness, disease, and ultimately the grave. And He is now seated at the Father's right hand and promises to return in making all things new. So, we pray this series will help us to grow in the certainty of what we've been taught and spur us on to serve as faithful witnesses to the truth and beauty of the gospel story.

Sermon Introduction: *Our Role in God's Story*

Every Monday morning around 9:30am, our Administrator, Diane Davis calls me and gets right to the point: "Good morning Mark; it's Monday morning, time to go over your calendar." Now, I'm not an electronic calendar guy. I need to write things down, see it, touch it and take it in. So, I grab my "month at a glance" calendar book and we begin. And as she reminds me of my various "to-dos" and upcoming deadlines, I realize that we're only touching on one aspect of my calendar; the role I play as a Pastor.

But I have many other roles that I need to plan for: Husband to Aida, father to my children, grandfather to my boys, son, brother, nephew, friend, co-worker and neighbor. Now, I'm no one special, we all have differing roles to play in life. And our roles are fluid, meaning they change over time; hence the need to change hats as we continue life's journey. When we think of the many roles we play in life, we have recognize their importance in building solid relationships.

But the role we want to give serious consideration to this morning is our role in God's unfolding narrative of redemption. Perhaps some of us have never given it much thought. But our roles as Christ followers concern our relationship with God and the relationships of others with the one true God. So, we want to look at this text and see what we can learn from John's role as the forerunner to Jesus. We'll do so by discussing his ministry, his message and his baptism of Jesus.

John's Ministry: Preparation (vv.1-6)

(#3) Here in v.1, Luke sets the date of John's ministry within the context of secular history. Tiberius has succeeded Augustus as the Roman Emperor, Pilate is the governor, Herod the Great's sons are serving as tetrarchs.² Annas is no longer the high priest but mentioned because of his ongoing influence; Caiaphas is actually in office.³ And it's during this impressively marked time in history we're told, *"the word of the Lord comes to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness."*

During the Advent season, we discussed the priest Zechariah whose tongue was silenced because of his disbelief that he and Elizabeth would have a child in their advanced years. And after enduring a period of silence, Zechariah's tongue is finally loosed at the birth of his son John. In turn, Zechariah praised God for raising up a horn of salvation from the house of David. **(#4) Then he** turned his attention to baby John and declared how God would use him in a special way as, *"the prophet of the 'Most High' who would serve as the forerunner in preparing the way for the Lord. And his task would be pretty significant, 'giving knowledge of salvation to the Jewish people for the forgiveness of their sin.'"*

(#5) And in vv.4-6 of our text, Luke quotes from Isaiah 40. In those verses, Isaiah speaks of a voice in the wilderness declaring to the exiles that it's time to prepare for the LORD's coming: Straighten out the highway, lift up the valleys, bring down the mountains, level the ground and smooth out the plains so that nothing would impede the LORD's journey. And when he arrives so will his glory; the fullness of his presence among his people. Now here we are some 30 years later and these prophecies are reaching their ultimate fulfillment here at the river Jordan.⁴ John is the voice crying out to the people to prepare for the LORD's arrival so that all flesh (*every type of person in the world*) will see the salvation of God.

(#6 Blank) As the forerunner, John is declaring that the king is coming so get prepared for his arrival. When you're expecting guests in your home, you don't sit around waiting for them to arrive. No, you get busy! You prepare; you literally get your house in order! John is saying, "get your house in order!" Spiritually speaking, getting one's house in order is a matter of the heart: The valleys of the heart must be filled, pride of the heart must be brought low, crookedness of the heart must be made straight, and the roughness of the heart must become smooth. Because without a heart change; no one will see the salvation of God. The heart is the center of man's being. It concerns our minds, our wills and our

emotions. If our hearts are more drawn to that which is perishable over that which is imperishable, they won't be prepared for the king's arrival.

(#7) Jesus said in Matt 6, "*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" In context, Jesus is speaking of wealth but further implications also point to our loyalty to him. And this is true because the sundry treasures in our lives tell the tale of our hearts. Are they focused on the treasures of this earth or on our Savior who's reigning in the heavenlies? If I treasure success, power and accolades, my heart will be daily consumed in acquiring, nurturing and guarding those things because what we treasure in this life places demands on our loyalty in one form or another.⁵

(#8 Blank) So, the better option is to see our relationship with the God of the universe as our ultimate treasure. And mere head knowledge of our Savior won't get it done. Rather by faith, we fill our hearts to the overflow with the knowledge of Christ; who he is, what he's done for us and what he's doing in the world through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. It's asking ourselves, what's God up to, where is he at work and what's my role in his story? And we'll discover these things in our daily communion with him. Setting aside time each new day to be in the presence of our Savior through prayer, worship, the reading of scripture, and serving as his witnesses. This is our role as the people of God, when we gather and when we scatter; remaining loyal to Christ by perpetually preparing our hearts for his ultimate arrival. In so doing, we keep our hearts stayed on him.

John's Message (vv.7-20): *Baptism for the Repentance for the forgiveness of Sin*

(#9) We look back on v.3 and discover John's message concerns "*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin.*" **(#10) And in v.7**, the crowds are coming to the river Jordan. There's no music playing in the background and tears streaming down people's faces as they gather. Rather John is somewhat ticked as he refers to the crowd as a "*brood of vipers.*" And asks, "*Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" John is in full blown warning mode and he's not doing it with a smile on his face because that's not how you warn someone. When my children were small and it was warning time, I tried to scare them out of their little shoes because they needed to know Daddy was serious on what was required of them. John isn't playing around; he calls the people snakes to warn them that their hearts weren't prepared. And his message wasn't a take or leave proposition because their eternal security was on the line.

(#11) In v.8, he's obviously speaking to Jews, who were members of the covenant community by virtue of birthright. But he tells them, don't even form your lips in saying to yourselves, "*we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*" John is absolutely clear this salvation to come doesn't depend on bloodline. It depends on repentance and bearing good fruit as a result of said repentance. **(#12) And in v.9**, he issues another sober warning of pending judgment, "*Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*" In those days, the typical Jewish mind regarded baptism as a religious rite reserved for unclean Gentiles; not God's chosen people. But John shreds that notion to pieces by placing these Jewish people in the same category as unclean Gentiles.⁶ And what we can take away from this right now is that citizenship into the heavenly kingdom of God is not a done deal because a person was brought up in a Christian home. It's a done deal when God's grace is lavished on those who've bowed the knee to the rule and reign of King Jesus.

(#13) Now that John has the crowd's attention, they ask, *"What then shall we do?"* And he uses the opportunity to preach what the fruit of a repentant heart looks like: To the crowds, bear fruit to God by sharing possessions and food with those in need, To the tax collectors bear fruit to God by being fair in business, and to the soldiers, bear fruit to God by not extorting money from others by threat or false accusations but be content with your wages. **(#14) In v.19**, Luke fast forwards a bit to show how John's message of repentance was rebuffed by Herod the Tetrarch (Antipas). Here's a guy who unlawfully married his brother's wife and when John rebuked him, it didn't lead to repentance, rather he added to all the evil things he had done by throwing John in prison. **(#15 Blank) The phrase** grants us a word picture depicting how unrepentance stockpiles evil in our hearts like that proverbial junk drawer in our homes stores our junk: spare keys, tools, tape, pens, pencils, glue, flash lights, chargers, etc... And it's ugly in there, things are all tangled up and in desperate need of purging.

Hence the need for repentance because it's the only way we purge our hearts of stockpiled evil. Repentance literally means a change of mind, leading to a change of conduct in said area of life. Think of what the Apostle Paul wrote to **(#16) the church** at Corinth, *"For Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."* **(#17 Blank) The problem** with worldly grief is that it primarily let's self-down. Instead of being moved to repentance, worldly grief says, *"I'm better than that and I won't let that happen again."* That's pride talking, we're not better than that; we all sin and fall short of the glory of God every day in thought, word and deed. A life of worldly grief leads to spiritual death. On the other hand, first and foremost, Godly grief acknowledges it let God down. Therefore, it doesn't stop at regret, rather it continues in repentance, leading to a change of mind and a fresh pursuit of a life lived in obedience to God. Godly grief, not only leads to salvation; it keeps the believer from stockpiling evil in their heart. Here's the good news, when we repent, scripture assures us of God's forgiveness and it does more than make us feel better; it renews our confidence in knowing we serve a merciful God who called us by his grace and promises to keep us by his grace.

John's Baptism of Jesus *The Beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased* (vv.15-22):

(#18) Now we read in v.15, the people are wondering who John is. The intensity of his ministry and message is undeniable; could he be the Christ? John is spring-loaded with a response, *"I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."* **(#19) Alice Roosevelt** and her father "Teddy," the 26th President of the U.S. had a rocky relationship. Alice was a socialite in every sense of the word and craved attention in just about every setting. But she was very critical of her father's obsession with attention and was quoted **(#20) as saying**, *"He wants to be the bride at every wedding, the corpse at every funeral, and the baby at every christening."* Historians note that Teddy Roosevelt, was the kinda guy who would suck all the air out of the room in seeking to make everything about himself because image was everything to him.

(#21 Blank) Think about when someone gives you credit for something you didn't do and praises you for it. For that split second, you're caught between keeping your mouth shut and receiving the accolades but you know you have to speak up and you do so hoping the person still thinks you're awesome. John didn't have that problem. He didn't care about accolades or attention because he knew his role perfectly! He knew his job wasn't to come to seek and save the lost nor was it to bring judgment to bear on the

unrepentant. He used the opportunity to extol the supremacy of the one through whom salvation would come; Jesus Christ the Lord. He told the crowd Jesus' baptism was the better baptism; he would baptize with water as a sign of repentance but Jesus would baptize with the power of the Holy Spirit and fire. John was clear he wasn't worthy to do the job of a slave in untying Jesus' shoes. And he was clear he wasn't the judge, that role was reserved for Jesus who would separate the wheat from the chaff.

(#22) Luke writes in vv.21-22, *"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* Luke's

(#23 Blank) portrayal of the scene is without fanfare. Jesus was baptized with the people. He was another person in the crowd and no one jumped up and cheered when he and John came out of the water. It tells us that Jesus in his baptism simply identified with those he came to save.⁷ He had absolutely no need to repent of anything, His participation in the rite indicated his readiness to take up humanity's cause in salvation. And what's he doing after having been baptized? He's communing with the Father in prayer. We have no idea what Jesus said or if he prayed out loud. What we do know is that his prayers to the Father proved his complete dependence on Him in carrying out the divine mission of redemption in the world.

On this particular day, the curtains of heaven were pulled open in giving us a glimpse of the Father's reaction to the arrival of his Son. And the divine words of the Father were peppered with OT language in showcasing the who Jesus is and why he came. The Father declared him as the eternal Son, spoken of in Ps. 2 from the line of David, who will one day judge the nations. The one we're called to kiss and blessed are all who take refuge in him. He's the one whom the Father truly loves. And He's the servant spoken of in Is. 42, in whom the Father takes great delight; and at the close of his ministry, he will suffer and die for sin in reconciling all types of people from every tribe, tongue and nation to God. Because he came to set this world aright, in bringing you and me into the family of God.

Conclusion:

And because of Christ's great sacrifice on our behalf, we are now the beloved children in whom the Father is well pleased. We have been clothed in the righteousness of the Son; allowing us to live in this world with real and tangible hope in the promises of God for our future. Therefore, we embrace our roles in this unfolding narrative of redemption. We perpetually prepare hearts for our Savior's arrival through worship. And consistently purge our hearts of evil through repentance. And like John, we recognize our call to be faithful in pointing those in desperate need of salvation to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The one who reigns and rules in our hearts by faith to the glory of God.

¹ D.A. Carson & Douglas J. Moo, *And Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 207-208.

² *Lysanius* is a problem. Josephus mentions a man of this name who ruled extensive territory from his capital Chalcis until his death in 36 (or 34) BC (*Antiquities* 15:92) and some have concluded that Luke is mistaken. There are, however, inscriptions, which refer to a Lysanius at a later time who ruled as tetrarch in Abilene, which is to the north of the other regions mentioned. Morris, L. (1988). *Luke: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 3, p. 111). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ *Annas* was high priest AD 6–15, when the Roman governor Gratus deposed him. Five of his sons became high priest in due course, and *Caiaphas*, who held the office AD 18–36, was his son-in-law. Luke uses the singular, which shows that he knew there was only one high priest. He appears to mean that Caiaphas was actually in office, but that Annas still exercised great influence, perhaps even was regarded by many Jews as the true high priest (cf. Acts 4:6; Marshall notes Schürmann's translation 'Annas the high priest and Caiaphas'). Morris, L. (1988). *Luke: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 3, pp. 111–112). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ According to Luke, Jesus began his ministry when he was 30 years old (Luke 3:23).

⁵ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 142–143.

⁶ Michael Wilcock, *The Savior of the World: The Message of Luke's Gospel*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 54–55.

⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary, The Gospel According to Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 118-119.