

2nd Sunday in Advent (Series C)

December 6, 2015

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Epistle: Philippians 1:3-11

Lesson: Malachi 3:1-4

Psalm: Psalm 126

CLB Commentary: Pastor David Rinden

Luke 3:1-6, Second Sunday in Advent, Series C of ILCW.

“To Luke, the emergence of John the Baptist was one of the hinges on which history turned.” So wrote William Barclay in his commentary on Luke in his *The Daily Study Bible* series. The coming of John meant that God’s promise of the Messiah was near, even at the door and that people should prepare for the coming Messiah!

So important was John’s arrival that Luke documents it in no fewer than six ways. The promises of the Old Testament were being fulfilled. John the Baptist announced the Messiah’s coming by preaching a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” based on the Word of God revealed to him in the wilderness.

The quotation in this text is from Isaiah 40:3-5, and describes John’s ministry in this way: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (vv. 4-6)

The Roman empire already showed signs of disintegration by the time John announced the Messiah; and the religious world was no better. Luke speaks of not one but two high priests. By intrigue and scheming, Annas was able to get five sons and son-in-law Caiaphas into office.

This is the world into which Jesus came. Scripture teaches it will be no better at the end of the age when Jesus comes again with power and glory.

John the Baptist’s voice would be used to “prepare” or “make ready” the way of the Lord. This preparation would be of the heart because this is where Jesus wishes to establish his kingdom. It is

the heart that needs to be prepared because it is the heart that is spiritually deficient; barren because of sin.

Because of the barrenness of the heart, this preparation must be started and completed by Christ. See John 1:29; Hebrews 12:1-2; Romans 3:20-26; Philippians 1:6. This is the Good News of the Gospel. Consider the meaning to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in Luther's Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith, in which Christian church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true."

Fredrick Wisloff, in his book *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, tells the story of a catechization one Sunday during a visit by the Bishop. It was an awesome day for the children who wished to do their best to remember the questions and answers from Luther's Small Catechism. The Bishop asked one boy to recite the meaning to the Third Article of the Creed. Nervously the confirmand began, but got only as far as this: "I believe I cannot of my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him"—but then he stumbled. The Bishop asked, "Is that all the farther you have come?" Embarrassed, the confirmand hung his head and nodded. The Bishop replied, "The Bishop hasn't gotten any farther than that either."

From start to finish, salvation is a work of Jesus Christ. Jesus' words on the cross, "It is finished" were not empty words. We have no personal righteousness to bring to God as if that would prepare us to meet him.

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

There will be blessings for those whose hearts are prepared: "*Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.*" (Luke 3:4-6; Isaiah 40:3-5)

In the days of Isaiah, a messenger was sent ahead of a king or ruler to repair the road upon which royalty was to travel.

So John was sent as the one to prepare the way for Jesus, the king, for he would surely come. And it would be he who would fill every valley, lower every mountain and hill and make the crooked

roads straight, and the rough places smooth.

Note that the way is prepared so that Jesus the King may come to us. We can't even meet him halfway.

And what are the blessings?

1. He comes to us so he can know our needs and provide them.

Philippians 4:19—“My God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

2. He comes to stay with us. His word to Zacchaeus was no idle word.

Luke 19:5—“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Revelation 3:20—“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”

3. He goes where we go.

Psalm 23:4—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

4. He is coming back to bring us to heaven to be with him. Death does not speak the last word. God speaks the last word and it is not a word of death, but a word of salvation for all who will receive it. It is the word of eternal life

John 14:1-3—“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Note: An appropriate hymn to sing with this text is “The Solid Rock.”

Note: The story as told by Fredrick Wisloff is in the book I Believe in the Holy Spirit. However, since retiring some of my books are still in boxes and I cannot find the page number. I'm remembering the story as best I can.