

*1In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. Luke 3:1,2*

If you have been following along with us you know we have begun a study through the book of Luke. Luke was Physician, and a companion of Paul. He wrote this gospel bearing his name, and also the Book of Acts. He wrote his gospel account with an eye on being accurate and historic. At the beginning of this book he stated, he was undertaking *to compile an account of the things accomplished among us (the early church), just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word (the apostles)*. With this goal in mind, Luke framed the events of this gospel in the time and place that they happened. We must bear in mind that this is about three years before Christ's crucifixion so all the rulers are in place. He mentions *Tiberius Caesar*, the ruler of Rome, *Pontius Pilate*, the Roman appointed governor, *Herod* (Herod Antipas ruled Galilee in Jesus' time). He succeeded his father, Herod the Great, and was appointed by the emperor. Philip, Herod's brother and Lysanias were Roman appointed rulers (*tetrarchs*) of areas, like counties, above Galilee.

Luke then mentions the Jewish rulers at this time, *the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas*. This matches John's gospel account, *They led Him (Jesus) away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year*. It seems that these two shared high priestly duties. Luke gives a specific date, *the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar*. Tiberius, the second Roman emperor, reigned from AD 14 to 37. If Luke's dates are correct, *the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness* in 29 AD.

This is helpful for us in accepting that Christ is not a mythological figure but a real person, *He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. Eph 2:17* John the Baptist's mission was to prepare the way for Christ as his father Zacharias prophesied, *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people. Luke 1:76,77*

Last week we looked at the boy Jesus growing *in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man*. Now we have fast forwarded to the time when John announced the beginning of Jesus public ministry. *The word of God came to John.*

*3He went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him. 5Every valley shall be filled in, and every mountain and hill made low. The crooked ways shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth. 6And all humanity will see God's salvation.' " Luke 3:3-6 BSB*

We know even less about John the Baptist than Jesus. Mark wrote that he *appeared in the wilderness. He was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey*. Some theories say that he may have spent time with the Essenes who *inhabited the settlement at Qumran, a plateau in the Judean Desert along the Dead Sea*. This area is west of Jerusalem and is in the area where the *Dead Sea Scrolls* were found. The Essenes were a community of ascetics. *The Essenes lived in various cities but congregated in communal life dedicated to voluntary poverty, daily immersion, and asceticism (their priestly class practiced celibacy)* Wiki We know of them from the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus.

*For three forms of philosophy are pursued among the Judeans: the members of one are Pharisees, of another Sadducees, and the third [school], who certainly are reputed to cultivate seriousness, are called Essenes; although Judeans by ancestry, they are even more mutually affectionate than the others. Whereas these men shun the pleasures as vice, they consider self-control and not succumbing to the passions virtue. Josephus*

There is no proven tie of *John the Baptist* with the Essenes but it is interesting that Mark writes *appeared in the wilderness*, the wilderness that was to the east of Jerusalem and John began baptizing in the area to the north of the Dead Sea near the settlement of the Essenes. Mark's gospel tells us,

*4John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7And he was preaching, saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to bend down and untie the straps of His sandals. 8 I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark 1:4-8*

John knows his place, he understands that He is not the Christ, *One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to bend down and untie the straps of His sandals*. He told those that were following him, *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'* He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. *Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. 30He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3:28-30* God had chosen him and he knew it but he also knew he was not the Christ but had come to prepare the way for Him. *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Matt 3:1,2* Jesus stated, *among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*. John knew his role, his ministry was short live but necessary to fulfill prophecy, *this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'*" *Matt 3:3* John's message may sound harsh but he was sent to call the Jews to repentance, *break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD. Hosea 10:12* Hebrews 12:11 states, *No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way*. That was John's, to make a people ready for the Lord. To the crowds he said, *"You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit, then, in keeping with repentance.*

*7Then John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8Produce fruit, then, in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9The axe lies ready at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Luke 3:7-9*

I'm certain he had compassion to those who were repenting but his harsher words were for those who couldn't find it in their hearts to repent. To the Pharisees and Sadducees he said,

*5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to*

*him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. 7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

The Jews of this time were ready for the Messiah and anticipated His arrival. Many knew in their hearts this turning again to the Lord, a time of revival. *Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Lam 3:40* Mark wrote, *all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem.* John’s message was that people repent and be baptized. But the religious leaders had hard hearts, they wanted to look righteous, holy but didn’t want to do the hard work of repentance. God was crying out through John for His people to *turn again to the LORD*. Into this setting John came preparing the way of the Lord. Jesus began to preach, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand Matt 4:17* Jesus declared, *blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice.*

Our challenge today is to root out our inner Pharisees, to not be as interested on how we look on the outside as what we are like on the inside. James wrote,

*7Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. James 4:7-10*

We are to want revival in our day. May our hearts long for the purity that are the result of repentance and faith in Christ. Revelations ends with these words from Jesus, *I am coming quickly.*

*He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Revelations 22:20,21*

May our prayer be *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!* May your Holy Spirit prepare the way for your coming in our hearts today.