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# Narrative Lectionary

Year 3 | The Year of Luke

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## Scripture Readings January 10, 2021 *The Epiphany*

### **.....** **About the text**

JOHN WAS LAST SEEN “in utero”...the little fetus who stirred when his mom Elizabeth greeted her cousin Mary.

The John we meet today is still a prophet, and his waxing energy captivates us. We’d call John’s words and actions “prophetic” today, because often that word means, to us, “fearless.”

Maybe that’s part of his character, but the key to understanding him is that John is discerning. He names the faults and flaws in seekers’ lives. He offers remedies, not condemnation.

John is a wildman, but he’s a wildman on a mission.

When his cousin Jesus arrives, John’s mission is complete—he might even be in prison already. It is up to God’s Spirit to name the One who just showed up.



## Luke 3:1-22

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene,<sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.<sup>3</sup> He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,<sup>4</sup> as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?<sup>8</sup> Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.<sup>9</sup> Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

1 In the fifteenth year of the rule of Caesar Tiberius—it was while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; Herod, ruler of Galilee; his brother Philip, ruler of Iturea and Trachonitis; Lysanias, ruler of Abilene;<sup>2</sup> during the Chief-Priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—John, Zachariah’s son, out in the desert at the time, received a message from God.<sup>3</sup> He went all through the country around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of life-change leading to forgiveness of sins,<sup>4</sup> as described in the words of Isaiah the prophet:

Thunder in the desert! · “Prepare God’s arrival! · Make the road smooth and straight! ·<sup>5</sup> Every ditch will be filled in, · Every bump smoothed out, · The detours straightened out, · All the ruts paved over.

6 Everyone will be there to see · The parade of God’s salvation.”

7 When crowds of people came out for baptism because it was the popular thing to do, John exploded: “Brood of snakes! What do you think you’re doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snake-skins is going to deflect God’s judgment?<sup>8</sup> It’s your life that must change, not your skin. And don’t think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as ‘father.’ Being a child of Abraham is neither here nor there—children of Abraham are a dime a dozen. God can

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10 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" <sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

<sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

<sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. <sup>19</sup> But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, <sup>20</sup> added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been

## The Message

make children from stones if he wants. <sup>9</sup> What counts is your life. Is it green and blossoming? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire."

<sup>10</sup> The crowd asked him, "Then what are we supposed to do?"

<sup>11</sup> "If you have two coats, give one away," he said. "Do the same with your food."

<sup>12</sup> Tax men also came to be baptized and said, "Teacher, what should we do?"

<sup>13</sup> He told them, "No more extortion—collect only what is required by law."

<sup>14</sup> Soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He told them, "No shakedowns, no blackmail—and be content with your rations."

<sup>15</sup> The interest of the people by now was building. They were all beginning to wonder, "Could this John be the Messiah?"

<sup>16</sup> But John intervened: "I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. <sup>17</sup> He's going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."

<sup>18</sup> There was a lot more of this—words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them. The Message! <sup>19</sup> But Herod, the ruler, stung by

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baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,<sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

## The Message

John’s rebuke in the matter of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife,<sup>20</sup> capped his long string of evil deeds with this outrage: He put John in jail.

21 After all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized. As he was praying, the sky opened up<sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit, like a dove descending, came down on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”

# Psalm 51:6-17

6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. · 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. · 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. · 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. · 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. · 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. · 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. · 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. · 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. · 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. · 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. · 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

6 What you’re after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life. · 7 Soak me in your laundry and I’ll come out clean, scrub me and I’ll have a snow-white life. · 8 Tune me in to foot-tapping songs, set these once-broken bones to dancing. · 9 Don’t look too close for blemishes, give me a clean bill of health. · 10 God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life. · 11 Don’t throw me out with the trash, or fail to breathe holiness in me. · 12 Bring me back from gray exile, put a fresh wind in my sails! · 13 Give me a job teaching rebels your ways so the lost can find their way home. · 14 Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God, and I’ll sing anthems to your life-giving ways. · 15 Unbutton my lips, dear God; I’ll let loose with your praise. · 16 Going through the motions doesn’t please you, a flawless performance is nothing to you. · 17 I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. · Heart-shattered lives ready for love don’t for a moment escape God’s notice.

The Narrative Lectionary presents the story of God’s work in humanity through a single Gospel each year. This is Year 3: The Year of Luke.