

Luke 3:1-8
August 5, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What meaning does baptism have for you? [Let people engage]

Q: What are the misconceptions of baptism that you're aware of? [Some think that baptism = salvation]

Transition: As in 2:1 Luke opened this account by tying the opening events of Jesus' ministry to contemporary history. For Luke the beginning of Jesus' ministry started at a particular time in history (the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign) with John the Baptist's ministry. When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, no prophetic voice had been heard in Israel for 400 years. Luke introduces us to the ministry of John the Baptist. As we read this text, you will discover that Luke gives us illustrations of what John the Baptist's ministry entailed. But more importantly, I'd like us to identify John's central message and begin thinking about how we can be a voice in a world of darkness.

All of us CAN share the gospel effectively BY emphasizing the importance of repentance and offering EXAMPLES of what a changed life looks like. We will find some of those examples in today's reading. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.1:

- In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracoonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—

V.2:

- during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

V.3:

- He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

V.4:

- As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'

V.5:

- Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

V.6:

- And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"

V.7:

- 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?"

V.8:

- Produce fruit 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.1: Luke wanted his readers to understand what chapter of history they were in when the word of God came to John. So let’s appreciate the seven different men that Luke identified. Who are they?

- Tiberius Caesar – Roman emperor
- Pontius Pilate – Governor of Judea
- (3) Tetrarchs: Herod of Galilee, Philip of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias of Abilene
- Annas and Caiaphas – (2) high priests [Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas]

Q V.2: Who did God’s word come to? [John the Baptist, a humble Jewish prophet – not the priests!]

Q: Where was John when he received God’s word? [In the desert]

Q V.3: What was the central message of John’s ministry? [He was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”]

Q: What does “repentance” mean? [literally *change of mind*, a 180, to turn away from sin]

Augment: Evangelism Explosion Repentance is not just feeling bad about your sin, but it is a changing of your behavior.

Q: A unique feature of John’s ministry was baptism, which was nothing new to the people. Jews often baptized Gentile proselytes. But John baptized Jews, which was unusual. So, what did his baptism represent? [That an individual repented. Thus, baptism was an outward picture of an inner change of heart.]

Q: And where did he take this message? [All the country around the Jordan]

Observation: If you’re wondering why he did his baptizing work around Jordan, John was visibly taking on himself the role of Elijah. It is possible that he picked this area on the lower Jordan because that was where Elijah spent his last days (cf. 2 Kings 2:1–13).

Q V.4-6: Luke records a beautiful prophecy from Isaiah. Why does Luke insert this in his writing? [He wants his readers to know that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of this prophecy.]

Q: Who is the “voice of one calling (crying) in the desert?” [John the Baptist]

Observation: He was like the herald who went before the royal procession to make sure the roads were ready for the king. Spiritually speaking, the nation of Israel was living in a

“wilderness” of unbelief, and the roads to spiritual reality were twisted and in disrepair. The corruption of the priesthood (instead of one, there were *two* high priests!) and the legalistic hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees had weakened the nation spiritually. The people desperately needed to hear a voice from God, and John was that faithful voice. ***It was John’s task to prepare the nation for the Messiah and then present the Messiah to them. He rebuked their sins and announced God’s salvation.***

Q: And what is John’s message? [Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him, make crooked roads straight, make the rough ways smooth.]

Observation: I want you to appreciate that when a king traveled the desert, workmen preceded him to clear debris and smooth out the roads to make his trip easier.

Q: Who is the king for whom John is “making straight paths?” [the Messiah]

Q: Let’s figure out the spiritual parallel. Just as a forerunner precedes a king to clear debris and smooth out the roads to make his trip easier, John would[make sure that the way of the Messiah would be made smooth because John will prepare a large number of people who would be ready receive Jesus’ message. **X-Ref Luke 1:17**]

Q V.6: And WHO will see “God’s salvation?” [ALL mankind]

Q: What’s significant about “all” mankind? [Luke is emphasizing the universality of the gospel]

Transition: John wasn’t exactly one who soft-pedaled the gospel message. He was quite forthright!

Q V.7: Why does John feel a need to identify the crowds coming toward him as a “brood of vipers?!” [Apparently, some were coming with the belief that baptism alone could insure salvation.]

Q: John presents a key question, “Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” What is he trying to accomplish? [Possibly a provocation, i.e. what brings you here?!]

Q V.8: The answer follows in the next verse. What is the first response you see? [Produce fruit in keeping with repentance]

Q: What does he mean by that? [Luke is emphasizing that baptism and holy living go hand in hand. There should be an observable change.]

Q: What is the second response in this verse? [And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father...’]

Q: What is John the Baptist saying here? [Don’t rely on your lineage to Abraham to save you. Don’t assume that salvation can be acquired by means of a rite like baptism. ***True repentance will produce fruit.***]

Q: Then John says, “For I tell you that out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham.” What message is he trying to get across to his Jewish listeners? [From lifeless stones God the Creator can create children for Abraham. He does not need physical offspring. Apart from repentance, one’s physical descent from Abraham is valueless.]

LOOK:

How are we to live in light of this text? Perhaps the Lord has made you another “John the Baptist” who is to share the gospel with particular individuals in your circle of influence.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 180–181). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Luke 3–4

If Socrates would enter the room, we should rise and do him honor,” said Napoleon Bonaparte. “But if Jesus Christ came into the room, we should fall down on our knees and worship Him.”

Dr. Luke would have agreed with the famous French general, for in these two chapters, he makes it clear that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God. Notice the witnesses that he presents, all of whom declare that Jesus is God’s Son.

John the Baptist (Luke 3:1–20)

When he came (vv. 1–2). When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, no prophetic voice had been heard in Israel for 400 years. His coming was a part of God’s perfect timing, for everything that relates to God’s Son is always on schedule (Gal. 4:4; John 2:4; 13:1). The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar was A.D. 28/29.

Luke named seven different men in Luke 3:1–2, including a Roman emperor, a governor, three tetrarchs (rulers over a fourth part of an area), and two Jewish high priests. But God’s Word was not sent to any of them! Instead, the message of God came to John the Baptist, a humble Jewish prophet.

How he came (v. 3). Resembling the Prophet Elijah in manner and dress (Luke 1:17; Matt. 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8), John came to the area near the Jordan River, preaching and baptizing. He announced the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 3:3) and urged the people to repent. Centuries before, Israel had crossed the Jordan (a national baptism) to claim their Promised Land. Now God summoned them to turn from sin and enter His spiritual kingdom.

Keep in mind that John did much more than preach against sin; he also proclaimed the Gospel. The word *preached* in Luke 3:18 gives us the English word *evangelize* (“to preach the Good News”). John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and told people to trust in Him. John was only the best man at the wedding: Jesus was the Bridegroom (John 3:25–30). John rejoiced at the opportunity of introducing people to the Saviour, and then getting out of the way.

A unique feature about John’s ministry was baptism (Luke 20:1–8; John 1:25–28). Baptism was nothing new to the people, for the Jews baptized Gentile proselytes. But John baptized *Jews*, and this was unusual. Acts 19:1–5 explains that John’s baptism *looked forward* to the coming of the Messiah, while Christian baptism *looks back* to the finished work of Christ.

But there was something even beyond John’s baptism, and that was the baptism that the Messiah would administer (Luke 3:16). He would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit, and this began at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1ff). Today, the moment a sinner trusts Christ, he or she is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

What is the “baptism of fire”? It does not refer to the “tongues of fire” at Pentecost, for tongues over a person’s head could hardly be called a “baptism.” John’s use of the symbol of “fire” in Luke 3:9 and 17 indicates that he is talking about *judgment* and not blessing. In A.D. 70 the nation experienced a baptism of fire when Titus and the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the people. All unbelievers will experience a baptism of judgment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

Why he came (vv. 4–20). The illustrations used in the chapter help us understand the ministry God gave to John.

To begin with, John the Baptist was *a voice* “crying in the wilderness” (Luke 3:4; also see Isa. 40:1–5 and John 1:23). He was like the herald who went before the royal procession to make sure the roads were ready for the king. Spiritually speaking, the nation of Israel was living in a “wilderness” of unbelief, and the roads to spiritual reality were twisted and in disrepair. The corruption of the priesthood (instead of one, there were *two* high priests!) and the legalistic hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees had weakened the nation spiritually. The people desperately needed to hear a voice from God, and John was that faithful voice.

It was John’s task to prepare the nation for the Messiah and then present the Messiah to them (Luke 1:16–17, 76–77; John 1:6–8, 15–34). He rebuked their sins and announced God’s salvation, for without conviction there can be no conversion.

John is also compared to *a farmer* who chops down useless trees (Luke 3:9) and who winnows the grain to separate the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3:17). Like some “religious sinners” today, many of the Jews thought they were destined for heaven simply because they were descendants of Abraham (see John 8:31–34; Rom. 4:12–17; Gal. 3:26–29). John reminded them that God gets to the *root* of things and is not impressed with religious profession that does not produce fruit. In the last judgment, the true believers (wheat) will be gathered by God, while the lost sinners (chaff) will be burned in the fire.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 210-211)

A. *The ministry of John the Baptist (3:1–20) (Matt. 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8)*

As noted earlier (Luke 1:80) John the Baptist lived a life of seclusion till his meteoric rise in public prominence and his sudden fall by the edict of Herod.

1. THE INTRODUCTION OF JOHN (3:1–6).

3:1–2. John’s message began **in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar**, that is, A.D. 29. Tiberius ruled over the Roman Empire from A.D. 14 to A.D. 37. **Pontius Pilate** was appointed **governor of Judea** in A.D. 26 and ruled to A.D. 36. He was generally opposed to the Jewish people over whom he ruled. The **Herod** here is Herod Antipas who ruled from Tiberius over **Galilee** from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. **His brother Philip** ruled to the east of the Jordan from 4 B.C. to A.D. 34. (See chart on the Herods at 1:5.) Herod’s capital was at Caesarea Philippi. Little is known about **Lysanias** who ruled in **Abilene**, northwest of Damascus. John’s ministry also began in the time of **Annas and Caiaphas**. Annas was the high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15 but was deposed by the Roman authorities. Eventually his son-in-law, Caiaphas, was placed in the position (A.D. 18–36). The Jews continued to recognize Annas as the rightful high priest though Caiaphas functioned in that role (cf. comments on Acts 4:5–6 and see chart there on Annas’ family; also cf. comments on Luke 22:54; Acts 7:1).

Luke noted that **the word of God came to John ... in the desert**. The Old Testament is filled with similar phrases as God called specific prophets to perform tasks. Luke had previously noted that John remained in the desert until his public appearance (1:80).

3:3–6. John’s message was **a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. John’s baptism was associated with repentance, that is, it outwardly pictured an inner change of heart. The word “for” (*eis*) refers back to the whole “baptism of repentance.” The baptism did not save anyone, as is clear from what follows (vv. 7–14). Repentance was “unto” (lit. rendering of *eis*; cf.

comments on Acts 2:38) or resulted in sins forgiven. Since John's function was to be Christ's forerunner, so also his baptism prefigured a different baptism (Luke 3:16). Luke noted that John's baptizing work was in **the country around** (*perichōron*) **the Jordan**. Because John was visibly taking on himself the role of Elijah, it is possible that he picked this area on the lower Jordan because that was where Elijah spent his last days (cf. 2 Kings 2:1–13). Luke quoted from Isaiah 40:3–5 concerning John's ministry. **Isaiah** was writing of God's smoothing the way for the return of the exiles from Babylon to Judah. But all three Synoptic Gospel writers applied Isaiah's words to John the Baptist.

Isaiah wrote, "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert, prepare the way for the Lord.'" But Matthew, Mark, and Luke each wrote, **A voice of one calling in the desert**—the words "in the desert" going with the "voice" rather than with the preparing of the way. Why? Because they quoted from the Septuagint. Of course, both are true—the voice (of John the Baptist) was in the desert, and the desert was to be smoothed.

When a king traveled the desert, workmen preceded him to clear debris and smooth out the roads to make his trip easier. In Luke the leveling of the land was a figurative expression denoting that the way of the Messiah would be made smooth because through John a large number of people were ready to receive Jesus' message (cf. Luke 1:17).

Typical of Luke's emphasis on the universal availability of the gospel are his words in 3:6, **And all mankind will see God's salvation.**

2. THE MESSAGE OF JOHN (3:7–14)

Luke recorded the message of John in ethical terms. John's teaching was that one's life proves whether or not he has truly repented (cf. the Book of James). Ethical teaching was important to Luke for he wrote frequently about helping the oppressed and the poor.

3

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1516-1517). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

3:1 Josephus refers to a Lysanias who was ruler of Chalcis and executed by Mark Antony in 36 B.C., leading some to accuse Luke of error here. But Josephus also appears to have spoken of another Lysanias, one who ruled the city of Abila some time before A.D. 37. Inscriptional evidence from near Abila confirms that a Lysanias was associated with the area around A.D. 14. Luke's placement of the tetrarchy of Lysanias in approx. A.D. 26–29 (the fifteenth year of Tiberius is disputed) therefore seems assured.

3:2 Caiaphas was high priest from A.D. 18–36. His father-in-law, Annas, preceded him as high priest but was deposed in A.D. 15. Annas nevertheless remained a powerful figure in priestly leadership for some time, and Luke referred to his de facto high priestly authority as retained during the tenure of Caiaphas. In 1990 an ossuary believed to be that of Caiaphas was discovered in Jerusalem (see Jn 18:13).

3:3 John's baptism was a preparatory rite, not only symbolizing the confession of sin and the intention of the one baptized to live responsibly under God, but also looking forward to the coming Mightier One who would purge His people and baptize them with the Spirit. Acts 19:4 shows that

Luke did not envision John's baptism (or the repentance associated with it) would provide salvation; faith in the Messiah was still necessary.

3:6 The standard Hebrew text of Is 40:5 does not contain this phrase, but the Greek translation of this passage does. Presumably the ancient Jewish translator added the phrase as a marginal note for the revelation of God's glory, a justifiable inference from the larger context of Is 40–66. The significance of Jesus as a Savior for all humanity is a recurring theme in Lk (1:76–79; 2:11–14, 29–32). Luke did not suggest a form of universalism in which every person will be saved but instead emphasized that salvation will extend beyond Israel to the Gentiles (see Acts 11:18).

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 126–133). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context for Luke 3:1-6

As in 2:1 Luke opened this account by tying the opening events of Jesus' ministry to contemporary history. For Luke the beginning of Jesus' ministry started at a particular time in history (the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign) with John the Baptist's ministry. That Jesus' ministry began with, rather than after, John the Baptist's is evident not only from the present text but also from Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24–25. The good news of the gospel (Acts 10:36) began with God's word coming to John (Luke 3:2). Mark had a similar understanding of the gospel's beginning, for John's appearance is the first account found in his Gospel (Mark 1:2–11). Those who maintain that Q was a written source used by Matthew and Luke believe that it also contained at its beginning a similar account concerning John the Baptist's ministry. This may explain some of the unique Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark in this account.

Comments

3:1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Although at first glance this appears to give us a specific date for the beginning of John's ministry, upon closer examination several problems arise. (1) Did the first year of Tiberius's reign begin in A.D. 11/12 when he became co-regent with Augustus Caesar, or did the first year begin on August 19, A.D. 14 when Augustus died? (2) Did Luke distinguish between the accession year and the regnal year and count the period between August 19 and New Year's Day as a year? (3) Did he include this period between August 19 and New Year's Day with the first regnal year? (4) Which calendar was Luke using for the regnal years of Tiberius? Was it the Julian (1 January), the Jewish (1 Nisan), the Syrian-Macedonian (1 October), or the Egyptian (29 August)? If, as seems more likely, Luke reckoned these years from Augustus's death, the fifteenth year probably would be A.D. 28 plus or minus a year. Unfortunately, the references to the other rulers are not very helpful, for there were several years when their rules overlapped. Luke mentioned them less to add chronological precision than to relate the decisive event of salvation history to the context of world history.

When Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. The term "governor" could be used to describe a procurator or prefect, of which Pilate was the latter, as a famous inscription discovered at Caesarea in 1961 reveals. We encounter Pilate again in 13:1; 23:1–56. Pilate ruled Judea from A.D. 26–36.

Herod tetrarch of Galilee. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and step-brother of Philip the tetrarch, who was also a son of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee as tetrarch from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. His step-brother Philip reigned until A.D. 34.

Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene. It is uncertain why Luke mentioned Lysanias. Some have speculated that it may have been because Luke came (supposedly) from Syria, and Abilene bordered Syria.

3:2 During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. Caiaphas was the actual high priest at this time, but Annas was the high priest from A.D. 6–15; and it was customary to attribute the title to former living high priests since the high priesthood was a “life office.” (A contemporary practice can be found in addressing former presidents of the United States as “Mr. President.”) Annas continued to exert a strong influence in Israel’s religious life after A.D. 15. The plural “high priests” is found throughout the Gospels, and Annas is called the high priest in Acts 4:6 and John 18:19 (cf. 18:13, 24).

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah. Luke reintroduced John here by the phrase “son of Zechariah.” The lack of this phrase in the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark indicates that its presence here is due to Luke’s hand and that he was writing this account in light of what had preceded in chap. 1. Thus chaps. 1–2 are not a later appendage to 3:1f., but, on the contrary, Luke wrote 3:2 in light of chaps. 1–2. The similarity in wording to Jer 1:2; Hos 1:1; Mic 1:1; and Hag 1:1 indicates that Luke sought to portray John the Baptist as a God-sent prophet. As one filled with the Spirit from his birth (Luke 1:15, 44), he now fulfilled his role as a prophet (1:76).

In the desert. Mark 1:4 and Matt 3:1 place John “in the desert,” indicating that this was part of the tradition; but Luke prepared us for this by Luke 1:80, and he picked it up again in 7:24–28. Although this is a geographical designation, its main function is not to designate a physical place but to indicate that John was the promised prophet of Isa 40:3, i.e., the one who was the voice calling “in the desert” (Luke 3:4).

3:3 Preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John “preached” (cf. Acts 10:37) just like Jesus (4:18–19, 44) and the early church (Acts 8:5; 15:21), and his message was essentially the same “gospel” (3:18) Jesus and the early church proclaimed.

“Repentance” here literally means *a change of mind* but refers more broadly to the human dimension involved in the experience of conversion in contrast to the divine element (regeneration).

“The forgiveness of sins” is a present realization of the future eschatological forgiveness at the final judgment. The message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is a central theme in Luke-Acts and must always be a central part of the gospel message.

This forgiveness, which already has been mentioned as part of John’s ministry in 1:77, is seen as intimately associated with repentance (24:47; Acts 5:31) and is the desired result of John’s baptism. See Introduction 8 (6). This does not mean that baptism is understood as a rite that automatically brings forgiveness, i.e., that baptism brings forgiveness *ex opere operato*.

Baptism is not to be isolated from the repentance mentioned here. Nor is it to be isolated from faith. Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.5.2; 18.116–19) also stated that John’s baptism required a “cleansed soul,” and the baptism-washing at Qumran [3:3–12; 5:13–14] was likewise understood as doing nothing by itself.

3:4 As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet. See comments on 2:23. John the Baptist’s ministry, i.e., his preaching of a baptism of repentance to the people, is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy and witnesses to the fulfillment theme in Luke. See Introduction 7 (1). Whereas the Isaianic quotation that follows is preceded by a quotation from Mal 3:1 in Mark

1:2–3, both Matthew (11:10) and Luke (7:27) placed this quote from Malachi later in their Gospels due most probably to the influence of their Q source.

A voice of one calling in the desert. This picks up Luke 1:80. All four Gospels locate John's ministry in the desert, which biblical (Ezek 20:33–38; Hos 2:14–23) and contemporary literature (8:12–15; 9:18–20) portrayed as the likely sight for the renewal of the people of Israel. Both the location of John's ministry and his theme verse (Isa 40:3), which was the theme verse of the Qumran community (8:12–15), have caused a great deal of speculation about whether John was once a member of this community. If John had once been a member of the Qumran community, the "word of the Lord" coming to him probably would refer to his break with the community and his new understanding that the way to prepare for the Lord's coming was not through a monastic-like attempt to keep the law perfectly but to preach to the masses and prepare them for Messiah's coming. All this is highly speculative, however, and at the present time there is not sufficient evidence to tie them together in this way.

Prepare the way for the Lord. "Lord" refers here to the Savior of Luke 2:11 who is "Christ the Lord." John's preparation for the Lord can be seen in such passages as 7:29–30, 31–35; 20:1–8 and because several of Jesus' disciples were originally John's (cf. John 1:35ff.).

Make straight paths for him. "Paths for him" is literally "his paths." Matthew, Mark, and Luke all refer to "his" paths, whereas the LXX, following the Hebrew, has "paths of our God." This agreement of the Gospels against the OT texts indicates some literary relationship between the Synoptic Gospels. To "make straight" is a poetic way of saying "make easier."

3:5 Every mountain and hill made low. This and the other pictures in this verse should be seen as metaphors or images of repentance. To be "made low" (literally *humbled*) refers to the humbling of the proud mentioned earlier in Luke 1:52; 14:11; 18:14.

The crooked roads shall become straight. This may be an allusion to the "corrupt generation" (literally *crooked*) of Acts 2:40 (cf. also Luke 13:11–13). That Luke alone added Isa 40:4 to the Isa 40:3 quotation indicates that in his understanding repentance is part of the central core of the gospel message.

3:6 And all mankind will see God's salvation. The Lukan emphasis on the universal nature of the gospel, i.e., that God's grace is offered to all (cf. Luke 2:32), is seen here by his addition of this part of the Isaiah quotation (Isa 40:5b) to his source. This is not found in the parallel accounts in Matthew or Mark. That Luke added to Isa 40:3 (which was found in the tradition), Isa 40:4, skipped 40:5a, and then included 40:5b indicates that this latter statement was important for his theological emphasis. The universalism found here has been alluded to already in Luke 2:30–31. The term "salvation" is found in the LXX translation of Isa 40:5 and indicates that this, rather than the Masoretic text, was the OT text Luke was using.

The Lukan Message

This opening account of Jesus' ministry serves as an introductory summary for numerous Lukan themes. One of these involves the coming of divine salvation and the human response needed. That Luke wanted to emphasize the coming of salvation is evident by his preparation of this theme in 1:47, 69, 71; 2:11, 30 and above all by his unique addition of Isa 40:5b to the traditional quotation of Isa 40:3. (For a fuller discussion of this theme, see comments on 1:69.) The human response called for by this offer of salvation is also emphasized. It involves a *baptism of repentance* for the *forgiveness of sins*. The latter two expressions are tied together in 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31 (cf. also 26:18–20). The use of the expression "forgiveness of sins" to describe salvation is already found in Luke 1:77 and is also seen in 24:47. The material itself comes from

several of Luke's sources: 3:7–9 (Q); 3:10–14 (L, or perhaps Q material not found in Matthew); 3:15–17 (Mark and Q). Luke 3:18–20 is a Lukan summary based on such historical information as found in Mark 6:17–18. "Repentance" is found eleven times as a noun and fourteen times as a verb in Luke-Acts compared to a total of seven and three times in Matthew and Mark, respectively.

We also find in 3:1–2 the Lukan desire to place the coming of Jesus and John within the framework of secular and divine history. The former has already been seen and noted in 2:1–2. The latter is seen in the Lukan emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy. Luke introduced John the Baptist's mission with an OT quotation and thus placed his ministry within the divine plan. Consequently, his ministry was the fulfillment of prophecy. Luke would also introduce the ministries of Jesus, Peter, and Paul with OT prophecies (cf. 4:18–20; Acts 2:17–21; 13:47). Luke wanted Theophilus to understand that the things he had been taught were not done in a corner (Acts 26:26) but in fact occurred in accordance with the divine purpose for history. See Introduction 8 (1).

Several other Lukan themes are found in this passage. One theme is the demand for humility before God and is evident from Luke 3:5, which is a Lukan addition to the tradition and picks up such thoughts as found in 1:48, 51–52; 2:24. This theme will be repeated in 6:20–26. Another theme is that the gospel is for all. This will become clearer in 24:47 and above all in Acts, but it already has been alluded to in 2:30–32 and is quite clear in our passage from Luke's addition of Isa 40:5b.

Context for Luke 3:7-20

In this section Luke gave three examples of John the Baptist's preaching. The first (3:7–9) is eschatological in nature and proclaims that God's kingdom has come. Because of this the need to repent in light of the times is reinforced. The second (3:10–14) involves various ethical instructions describing the fruits that must accompany the repentance called for in 3:7–9. These two passages indicate that baptism by itself cannot save a person from the coming judgment if unaccompanied by a changed life. The third passage (3:15–17) deals with John's announcement of the coming Messiah. This is followed by a concluding summary of his ministry (3:18) and a historical summary (3:19–20) unique to Luke. The summaries serve to bring to a conclusion the story about John the Baptist before proceeding to the next one. This also serves to prepare for the only other account involving John found in Luke, which takes place during this imprisonment (7:18–28).

The close tie between the preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus (and the early church) is clearly seen in this material. John in fact served as an example for Christian preaching in Luke's day. Because this passage reflects so well the church's early teachings, some have suggested that these teachings did not originate with John but are later Christian teachings read back on his lips. Yet if the Qumran community warned against a merely formal ritual of washing (see comments on 3:3), why should it be difficult to assume that John taught similarly? There is no convincing reason these teachings could not have originated with John the Baptist.