

**Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**The Third Sunday of Advent, December 11, 2022**  
**Luke 3:7-18**

**The Song of Good News (John the Baptist) by Rev. Sue Trigger**

Luke 3:2-6

(NRSVUE)

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 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.  
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.’ ”

Luke 3:7–18

(NRSVUE)

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? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and 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. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” And the crowds asked him, “What, then, should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” 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.” As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 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 strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 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.” So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people.

The song of John the Baptist that we read in our first scripture lesson comes from the prophet Isaiah in chapter 40 of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Like the songs of Mary and Zechariah,

the words of the prophets are used during the Season of Advent to identify something about Jesus. We are reminded that the story of Jesus includes his cousin, John the Baptist.

There are several hymns in our hymnal that leap forward in time to tell us about who John grew up to be. Their lyrics tie him to the prophets as the one who would proclaim the Messiah. Most of these hymns are in the Advent section of the hymnal. If you want to take a look, you can turn to hymn 87, 95, 96, and 106 to find them.

One of my favorites is hymn 87. I put the text in the bulletin so you can follow along while we listen to the family of Nathan George playing their arrangement of the hymn. They recorded the hymn during the pandemic when their family could not be together. It's fun to know that we will see family members from North Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois, and Tasmania. Enjoy! (*Video link: [https://youtu.be/4Mw9AGvr\\_xk](https://youtu.be/4Mw9AGvr_xk)*)

John's song is full of good news. It begins by affirming that he is the one who will announce the coming of the Messiah. "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness." It goes on to paint a visual metaphor of who this Messiah will be. Through the one who is coming, all people will see the salvation of God

The Rev. Dr. Judith Jones, professor emeritus of religious studies at Wartburg College draws us deeper into the imagery of this passage. She explains that preparing the Lord's path toward peace requires overturning the world as we know it. It means rethinking systems and structures that we see as normal but that God condemns as oppressive and crooked. The author of Luke uses Isaiah's words to describe a total transformation. Jones wrote this about this passage, "These words can certainly be taken as mere pictures of road construction, [but] in the context of Luke's writings they evoke richer associations: valleys filled full, mountains and hills humbled, everything crooked made straight and true."<sup>1</sup>

The imagery from Isaiah shows us that John will prepare us to see God's arrival in the Messiah, and it will be transforming. The metaphor of the earth being leveled to an even plain is the kind

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, Judith, Working Preacher: Commentary on Luke 3:1-6, December 6, 2015

of transformation Jesus would bring. When Jesus carried out his ministry, he blessed the poor and the hungry and the weeping but announced woe for the rich and well-fed (Luke 6:20–26). You may have heard me describe Jesus as the great leveler. In his teachings, no one has too much, and no one has too little. The apostle Paul described this leveling in his letter to the Galatians when he said, “In the kingdom of heaven, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

During the season of Advent, we pause to hear the words of the prophets who showed us what it will take to welcome the Messiah. John announces the future that is coming. The future will bring the salvation of God: Israel will be freed from oppression and the world will be made right under God’s rule. God will open our eyes to the evil and injustice in the world. Those who create structures that destroy God’s creation and damage God’s creatures will no longer be able to hide their identity. All people will see and experience God’s salvation.

This salvation comes for the saving of souls and healing of bodies and reaches out to all of the cosmos. John’s message builds on the expectation already present in Israel, that God will come and turn this world right side up.

This season of Advent invites us to enter into the tension of this expectation. We live in its hope, even as we are frustrated because we are still waiting for a world filled with the sight, sound, and knowledge of God. In some ways, that is the experience the first people who heard John’s message had as well.

Jesus heard John, too. He heard the voice from the wilderness speaking to him and he took it to heart. Jesus heard the urgency of John’s message and understood that this was his time to act in obedience to God. John spoke a word from God about the overturning of this world and all its rulers, and Jesus heard that word. Today, we pause and listen, too.