



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



Second Sunday of Advent, Cycle C

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This reading, the beginning of Chapter 3 of Luke, follows the infancy narrative. This marks a kind of second beginning of Luke's gospel. Luke announces the appearance of John the Baptist in terms reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets, linking the event both to secular history and to Jewish religious history. A comparison with the gospels of Mark and Matthew reveals that Luke takes pains to present the Baptist as the last of the Old Testament prophets but clearly distinct from the new age that begins with Jesus. The Baptist prepares the way, but he does not begin the new age. He is the bridge from the Old Testament to the New.

Luke describes John's baptism as a baptism of repentance. His baptism called for a "*metanoia*," a turning around of one's life, a turning away from sin and toward the will of God. This is what was necessary to prepare for the coming of the kingdom in Jesus.

Luke quotes more of the passage from Isaiah than either Mark or Matthew. He includes the references to leveling the way and straightening the path. This quote from Isaiah highlights the universal scope of the coming salvation, which "*all mankind shall see*." Thus Luke signals a major theme of his gospel, the universality of salvation.

The image drawn with the words quoted from Isaiah recalls the practice of preparing the way for a monarch traveling through the wilderness where there was no road, '*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*' A crew of workers would precede him, making the way passable. So the Baptist calls us to be the crew of "*workers in the vineyard*" (see *Matt 20:1-16*) by preparing the pathways in our hearts for the coming of Christ.

As you reflect on this passage, note that the first half, the historical information, really paints a bleak picture. These were not generally good leaders, and the gospel will relate how several of them were involved in Jesus' death. But as Saint Leo the Great wrote, "*Jesus Christ was born to die on the cross.*" The winding road that the Mystical Body of Christ to this day makes straight is the way to Calvary. Our world can be a gloomy world into which the good news continues to be proclaimed. The turning point is the inbreaking of the Word of God in the arid landscape of the desert, where the River of Life will soon rain down, bursting forth the blooming colors of wildflowers, painting the beauty of God's Creation for all to enjoy.

Reflect on the first part as the darker times in your life when the path was not illuminated by the light of Christ. The second part, *all people shall see the salvation of God*, clearly conveys the sense of inspiration, excitement and urgency that marked the foreshadowing of the Light of Christ to all. The words of John the Baptist call out to us today just as powerfully as they did to the people of his time. In your reflection, lift your thoughts heavenward as you "*prepare the way of the Lord*" for yourself and others with the assurance that "*the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.*" (See *Phil 1:6*)

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A reading from the gospel according to Luke.

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 Ituraea and Trachonitis,
and Lysanias ruler of Abilene,
during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiphas,
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 people shall see the salvation of God.'"*