

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz

December 6, 2009 Advent 2. Luke 3:1-6



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 Taconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it 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. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall be made straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God’s salvation.’”

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

There is a pond – a very big pond – at the bottom of the hill in front of the Watertown Regional Medical Center. It’s a very nice pond – with that stone – washed gravel all around – and the neatly mowed grass – and really big pine trees – for shade and to block the wind. This wonderful pond was full of Canada geese and mallard ducks – hundreds of them – very nice. Sometimes – though – people complain that the ducks and geese are messy. I get that. Someone must have complained. Someone must have decided we don’t want the ducks and geese in the pond. So they scared them all away. How? With a picture of a grey fox – a life size picture of a grey fox – on a piece of tack board. They move it – every day. One day he’s at the end of the pond – the next day he’s in the middle – once by the pine trees – once closer to the drive way. Now he even has some garland wrapped around his neck. There are no Canada geese – no ducks anywhere near the pond! Imagine – hundreds and hundreds of geese – afraid of a piece of tack board! Are you afraid? Are you worried? Are you worried about H1N1? Are you afraid of the economy? Are you afraid of your family finances – if you can’t pay the bills – how in the world are you supposed to buy that new Christmas HD plasma TV? If you don’t have enough time to do all the things you are supposed to do – how are you going to clean the house and make dozens of cookies and decorate and wrap gifts and send out a clever Christmas newsletter – that your mother-in-law won’t find fault with? Are you worried for your country? Are you worried for your health? Are you worried for all the different people you love? Today God’s Word is comfort and encouragement – that will calm and heal your heart. Today God’s Word says:

Prepare the Way for Jesus! Law and Gospel will:

- 1. Fill in and knock down**
- 2. Straighten out and make smooth the road for Jesus!**

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on this morning – is all about the coming of the Savior. It’s about 30 years after baby Jesus was born. It’s about the beginning of the public ministry of the Son of Man. Before Jesus’ ministry began – just a little before Jesus began to preach and teach about the Kingdom of God – his cousin – John the Baptist did some preliminary work on peoples’ hearts. **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 Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas...** Tiberius Caesar is Emperor in Rome. Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus was born Tiberius Claudius Nero November 16th 42 years before baby Jesus was born. Tiberius was one of Rome’s greatest generals. His military campaigns laid the foundations for the whole northern frontier of the mighty glorious Roman Empire. But Tiberius didn’t want to be Emperor. Historians who wrote about him called him *the gloomiest of men*. The day came when he exiled himself from Rome and left control in the hands of an unscrupulous and murderous man. **Pontius Pilate was the Governor of Judea.** Pilate was not a kind man either. God’s Word says, “**Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans**

whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.” Luke 13:1 That’s hard to imagine isn’t it? That would be like being murdered up here in front of church—to have your blood mixed with baptism water or your blood mixed with communion bread and wine—Jesus’ body and blood. What possible circumstances—could justify people being killed with Roman swords, spears and arrows—at that most sacred place where whole burnt offerings, sin and guilt and fellowship offerings were made to the great I AM—so that people’s blood was literally mixed with the blood of bulls and sheep and lambs and goats? Though Pilate made a great show of washing his hands—the blood of many people stained his heart and conscience!

Herod was tetrarch of Galilee—Herod was the King of a quarter of his father’s kingdom. **Herod tetrarch of Galilee** was the son of *Herod the Great*! How do you get to be *The Great*? You need to do great stuff! Herod built stuff—like an aqueduct—beside the Mediterranean—an aqueduct so enormous—so massive—so great that literally 2 thousand years later—people will stand beside it and say, “Wow! Who built this? Herod? Wow!” That’s how you get to be *The Great*! Herod the tetrarch—Herod Antipas—is the Herod who had too much to drink one night—and promises Salome—anything she wanted—up to half his kingdom—if she would dance for his drunken friends. And when she didn’t know what to ask for—her mom said, “**Ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.**” And that’s what Herod gave her. This Herod—Herod Antipas was the Herod to whom Pilate tried to pass off Jesus. Herod Antipas was all excited to see Jesus—hoping he would do some miracle—some magic trick to entertain him and his friends. King Herod asked Jesus lots of questions—but Jesus gave him no answers. The Chief Priests and the teachers of the law stood there vehemently accusing Jesus. Finally Herod and his soldiers mocked and ridiculed Jesus. They dressed him in an elegant robe—a robe fitting for royalty—and disappointed—sent Jesus back to Pilate! That day—Herod found a friend in Pilate—but rejected his Savior and Redeemer!

His brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis. Philip married his niece—*Salome*—the one who danced for the death of John the Baptist. They say Philip was a moderate and quiet man—who always lived with the people he governed. When he traveled—he literally brought his judgment seat with him. Any time he ran into someone who needed justice—without delay he would set down his judgment seat—and hear his case. There he ordered the punishment of the guilty and declared the innocence of those who were unjustly accused! When it came to Philip—justice was swift and certain!

The last tetrarch was **Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene.** Abilene was a pretty little kingdom—on the western slopes of Mount Herman. It could be argued little kingdom is better than no kingdom. Lysanias was the King of Abilene and the high priest, too—until he was put to death by Mark Antony—because that’s what his wife Cleopatra wanted. She said he was too close to the Parthians. Remember Parthians? Remember that wondrous Pentecost—Thanksgiving—when the Holy Spirit was poured out to the point of overflowing—so that the disciples—like Peter, Andrew, James and John preached God’s Word in languages they had never studied—to people like **Parthians, Medes and Elamites—dwellers in Mesopotamia—Jews and Cretans...** Remember?

So—why did Luke—go to the trouble of telling you about Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip and Lysanias—Annas and Caiaphas? Are we really supposed to know about these guys? Yes, we are! God’s plan to save us from all our sins did not happen in a vacuum! The Great I AM—is the God of History—his story—his plan to save us happened in the real world in real time! It did! **When the fullness of time had come—God sent forth his Son—born of a woman—born under law—to redeem those under law**—that we might be adopted children of God!

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It was in the rocky stony Judean wilderness—by the Jordan River—probably not too far from the Dead Sea—that John the Baptist preached a blistering law. He called to the common people—and to the arrogant and self-righteous Pharisees and Chief Priests and teachers of the law—“Repent! Don’t be a bunch of little poisonous snakes! Be sad and sorry for your sins. Be baptized in the Jordan River—wash away your sin and guilt! Trust the precious Gospel promises of God—written down in Hebrew poetry—in the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. Know that the Lamb of God—will take away your sins—when he is pierced on the tree to redeem you!”

As it 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. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain

and hill made low. The crooked roads shall be made straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation." The one who does this heart highway work is the LORD! He fixes us. We don't fix ourselves. Again—we who are **dead in trespasses and sin** can't fix ourselves—any more than someone one down at Hafemeister's or Pederson's or Schmutzler-Vick gets themselves ready for their own funeral. **Every valley shall be filled in...** That's the low places—the potholes—the aspects of our life that are missing and lacking. That's not hard to see. Look at your family. Do you get impatient with them—frustrated with them when you are nervous and stressed? Are you careful what you say to them and how you say it? Are you careful of their feelings? Don't *say* what's mean or hurtful—do you just give them that look—like I can't believe you are so incompetent? That look—that way you roll your eyes—can be just as painful as if you said something incredibly hurtful—and you can give them that look—across the dinner table—clean across the room! Only Jesus can fill in those potholes—the lack of forgiveness! Remember last Christmas—or Christmas past—long, long ago—Christmas past—when someone gave you a cheap present—a worthless present—a present—if it was supposed to be a reflection of how they felt about you—was horrible! Remember a Christmas past—when someone—a relative—your mother-in-law did something that was really hurtful? And now—every Christmas—every Christmas for years and years—you tear off that scab—refusing to let it heal. Refusing to forgive and refusing most of all to forget! That's a pothole only Jesus can fill—forgiving all our sins. Only Jesus can knock down the mountains and hills of pride. The attitude that says, "I for one don't drink too much at the office Christmas party. I for one—don't drink too much egg nog—don't eat too many Christmas cookies—didn't stuff myself with stuffing on Thanksgiving!" Only Jesus can forgive the attitude that says, "My Christmas exterior illumination is much more beautiful than the tacky stuff my neighbor hauls out every year!" My Christmas gifts are much more generous than anything I get! My Christmas letter is far more humble than the boastful Christmas letter I get every year from my sister. My Christmas card is far more spiritual than the card I get that has squirrels and cardinals and says something about happy holidays! Only Jesus can so center our heart on the birth of the Christ child—that I have a new heart and a new attitude this Christmas time—centered on his forgiving love more and more!

And all mankind will see God's salvation." This busiest time of the year it's easy to become distracted by all the *things and stuff* that have become attached to Christmas. All that matters—all that really counts is the heavenly eternal inheritance the Christ child came to bring! There are two brothers living on the outskirts of Budapest, Hungary. They literally live in a cave just outside of Budapest. They are homeless people—people without hot and cold running water—without electricity or a washroom or furniture. They make money to buy food—by salvage—by sifting through garbage and trash—finding something—anything—that they can resell. Well, these two brothers just found out—they are in line for an inheritance. Did you hear this? An inheritance from their grandma on their mom's side. The sons say their mom was a difficult person. She was to blame? She broke off ties with them? Now their mom and their grandma died—they will inherit her estate. How much money do you suppose they get? \$6.6 billion—with a "B"! You and I have an inheritance much, much greater than that! We have an inheritance stored up for us in Heaven. We have an inheritance that moth and rust cannot corrupt. An inheritance where thieves cannot break in and steal. We have an inheritance of eternal life that will last forever! That's far far more precious than any amount of money! Our inheritance won't just change our life. It will change our *eternity!* Amen!

To God alone all glory!



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