

## *A Change of Mind and Heart*

Luke 3:1-6 (December 5, 2021)

### *Luke 3:1-6*

<sup>3</sup>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, <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. <sup>5</sup>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; <sup>6</sup>and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

### *Historical Context*

John’s hearers were probably already familiar with two kinds of baptism: the baptism by which Gentile converts became Jews and so embarked on a whole new way of life; and the ritual washings that the Qumran community understood as cleansing them, but only if they turned from their sins and obeyed God

### *Theme: A Change of Mind and Heart*

Luke’s litany of imperial, regional, and religious authorities does more than date John’s ministry to 28 or 29 CE. It also contrasts human kingdoms with God’s reign. John has been commissioned to prepare the way not for lord Caesar or any earthly lord, but for the one true Lord.

John challenges God’s people to see the wilderness as a place not of desolation, but of hope. God is calling them, like the Babylonian exiles, to leave their captors behind and head home through the wilderness. God is calling them, like the people of Israel in Egypt, to join an exodus out of slavery into God’s promised fresh start. John preaches that the first step on this journey toward freedom is a baptism of repentance.

Repentance (Greek *metanoia*) is not mere regret for past misdeeds. It means far more than saying, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me.” *Metanoia* means a change of mind and heart, the kind of inner transformation that bears visible fruit. John proclaims a baptism of repentance that leads to release from sins. The release or forgiveness that follows repentance does not undo past sins, but it does unbind people from them. It opens the way for a life lived in God’s service

Preparing for God’s arrival means rethinking systems and structures that we see as normal but that God condemns as oppressive and crooked. It means letting God humble everything that is proud and self-satisfied in us, and letting God heal and lift up what is broken and beaten down. The claims that the world’s authorities make often conflict with God’s claims. Paths that seem satisfactory to us are not good enough for God. John calls us to let God’s bulldozers reshape the world’s social systems and the landscape of our own minds and hearts. God’s ways are not our ways. But God’s ways lead to salvation.