



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 3 | January 7, 2018

Prepared by Curtis A. Bronzan  
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

## I. Introduction to this Study

This week we begin a new series we're calling Who Is This Man?

Despite the new series title, we're continuing in the Gospel of Luke, which we began in December and will continue until Easter! Our title "Who Is This Man?" is inspired by the beginning of Luke's gospel, where he explains his reason for writing.

## II. Connecting with One Another

We've just celebrated the end of one year and start of another. Do you have any resolutions?

Any old habits you'd like to let go of? Any new ones you'd like to begin?

## III. Study the Text

### a. Read Luke 1.1-4.

What reason does Luke give for writing his account? Who helped his research? To whom does he write? What is his hope for those who read his book?

Time permitting, read the outset of the Book of Acts, Luke's second account, and note the similarities.

### b. Read Luke 3.1-2.

Recall that Luke refers to his book as an "account" (which is a historical term) instead of a "gospel" (which is theological). With that in mind, why do you think Luke includes the names of seven different political figures in just these two verses? What is he trying to accomplish?

### c. One of the reasons Luke includes these names is to communicate, "the Jewish nation has been broken up; and, to add insult to injury, a Gentile, Pilate, clearly has the supremacy. Over the entirety of events Luke will narrate then hangs the shadow of Roman imperial power..."<sup>1</sup>

Why is this something he would want to communicate? What do earthly powers have to do with God's work? Or, more specifically, what do earthly rulers have to do with the ministry of John the Baptist?

### d. Read Luke 3.3-6.

John the Baptist must have reminded his first hearers of the Hebrew prophets of old (see, for instance, how the word of God came to Jeremiah in 1.1-14). Each of

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey, David Lyle. *Luke*. Grand Rapids; Brazos, 2012, 56.

the gospel writers draws attention to John's geographical location, in the "wilderness" or "desert."

Why do you think they do so? What would that call to mind for faithful Hebrews?

- e. In his quotation, Luke draws together repentance imagery from Isaiah 11 and comfort imagery from Isaiah 40.

How do these verses define the ministry of John the Baptist? How do you interpret the descriptions of the changes in nature?

- f. Fred Craddock writes "The inclusion of verses 4-5 of Isaiah 40 enables Luke to testify to the universality of the gospel and, as important, to show from the Old Testament that God's embrace of all nations is not a new theme but embedded in the tradition all along."<sup>2</sup>

Why do you think that theme was important for Luke to include? What connection does it have with the political language used earlier?

Why is God's "embrace of all nations" important for us to remember as well?

- g. Read Luke 3.7-9.

While John may seem like an entertaining figure to us, the crowds must not have enjoyed his message! David Lyle Jeffrey rightly concludes that he "would not have done well in a culture-affirming, therapeutic religious environment"<sup>3</sup>

John employs a creative play on words in verse 8: In Hebrew and Aramaic, children is *benayya'*, stones is *'abnayya*, and "to build up" is *bānâ*.

Why do you think John preempts their statement, "We have Abraham as our father"? Is there a problem with being in Abraham's lineage?

What would John preempt in our culture today? In other words, what do we hold as valuable and self-justifying?

- h. In verse 9, John anticipates Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 7.15-20. Do you think they meant the same thing? Why or why not?

- i. How would you respond to being called "a brood of vipers"? Why?

Read Luke 3.10. How do the people respond? Why do you think they respond this way?

- j. Read Luke 3.11-14.

What do you make of John's teaching? How are his instructions related to his earlier name calling!? If you were there, how could you imagine John instructing you?

"Repentance," from the Greek word *metanoia*, is often translated as "changing one's mind." What is repentance for John?

- k. Read Luke 3.15-20.

---

<sup>2</sup> Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville; John Knox, 2009, 48.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey, David Lyle. *Luke*. Grand Rapids; Brazos, 2012, 57.

John is careful to communicate that he is not the Messiah, even asserting that he is unworthy to untie Jesus' sandals! Third century Jewish protocol stated "a disciple will do every service of a slave for his master in regard to his teacher except loosening his shoe." And yet, John says he isn't worthy to do such a menial task! (note then, the significance of Jesus washing his disciples' feet in John 13!)

But there is more to John's statement. "To loosen the sandal strap" is a Hebrew marriage custom connected to levirate marriage (in which the closest brother-in-law would marry a widow, to protect and care for her). By loosening the strap of one shoe, a man could give up his right and obligation to marry a widow. Note also that Jesus and John are cousins ("brothers" in Semitic parlance)!

In other words, despite John's powerful ministry, he is not the bridegroom of Israel. That role can only be fulfilled by Jesus! And yet, when John is rightly critical of Herod's marriage to his brother's wife (while he was still living), he is locked up for it!

How does this marriage analogy deepen your understanding of John's humility and role?

I. Read Luke 3.21-22.

We've established that John's baptism was one of repentance. So, why was *Jesus* baptized!? Think about (or discuss) this before continuing.

Church father Cyprian comments: "Although he himself was not a sinner, he did not disdain to bear the sins of others."

Does that help you understand why Jesus was baptized? Why or why not?

IV. Pray

- a. Pray for yourself – and those you know – who have made resolutions for their good and God's glory this year;
- b. Lift up the incoming class of elders and deacons, that they would be led by the Spirit to boldly lead Good Shepherd;
- c. Ask God to help us go "Deeper into Community and Further Out in Faith"!