

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
January 10, 2021

Hi Friends,

Lord have mercy! The national events of this past week have made my heart ache. The displays of violence and destruction fueled by hate have left me saddened, frightened and angry. Let us lift our nation and one another in prayer as our leaders work to pick up the pieces and find a path forward.

After a little downtime last week, I am geared up to tackle the new year. As the COVID numbers are skyrocketing, I will continue to connect with you through these emails and Zoom worship. I recognize that for many of you as for myself these are lonely times. Add to that the wintery weather and it feels like the hours in a day go very slowly. If you need someone to talk to don't hesitate to give me a call. My contact info is always included in these messages. Also, if there is someone you would like to contact, give me a call and I will share their contact info.

The pre-school is looking for a Teacher's Aide for the Monday, Wednesday, Friday class beginning in February 2021. If you are interested or know someone who is interested, please contact Becky Watson at 610-858-1352. The pay is \$10 an hour for a 7 hour workday.

If you have prayer requested, please send them to me so that I can include them in my weekly newsletters.

Communion in the coming weeks:

Baptism of our Lord – January 10th

Third Sunday of the month – January 17th

May the joy, the peace and the love of Christmas continue to warm your heart and enlighten your days throughout the new year.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Denise

Home Phone 610-750-6432
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Luke 3:1-22

A reading from the 3rd chapter of Luke beginning at the first verse.

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius ... the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, **4** 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.

5 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;

6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. 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. **9** Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

10 And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” **11** In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” **12** Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

13 He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” **14** 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.”

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, **6** 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 thong of his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **17** 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.”

18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. **19** But Herod the ruler, who had

been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my

Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father,
With joy and awe we praise you for claiming us as your sons and daughters, and for pouring your Holy Spirit upon us. Help us to prepare this earth for your glory, and shine your light on all your faithful children, for the sake of the one whose birth and baptism brought renewal and transformation to this world, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I began to write this morning's message, I was hoping that the events of this past week would somehow leave me and allow me to focus on this morning's text. However, that was not the case.

The events of this week by which I am deeply saddened, confused and terrified cannot be shoved aside or placed into a box so that

we can just proceed as if they never happened.

This past week's events have left me longing to hear the voice of God comforting me, enlightening me, and directing me. And so it is with that heaviness in my heart that I have read and listened to this this morning's text and crafted this message.

Although the setting for this morning's text gives us a sense of serenity, like being at Gring's Mill by the Tullie or at Jim Deatrich Park behind the Farm House on a nice sunny day. Life was not a walk in the park for the people of Jesus day. Instead it was a life of challenge, a life of being oppressed and a life of anxiety for the people who had arrived at the Jordan to participate in this baptism of repentance.

A ruthless Roman ruler by the name of Tiberius now controlled his Roman constituents with an iron fist and his appointed overseers and managers were in charge of keeping the Jews in line and in their place at the bottom rung of society at all cost. The local officials treated the Jews with contempt and disdain in order to please the tyrant Tiberius. And not only did the Roman citizenry pledge their loyalty to this bully, but they were expected to go one step beyond that and worship Tiberius as their God.

Although the Jews had returned to their homeland and had rebuilt their beloved temple, they found themselves once again being used and abused much like their ancestors were when they were living in Egypt. The Jews longed for a word from their God that they would once again be rescued and their lives and livelihoods would be restored.

So, when word got around that there was this preacher/prophet named John, who was preaching

about a new day about to dawn; they were more than willing to make the long trek out of the city to the river Jordan to hear what this man had to say.

And although John began by chastising the people of the crowd for their fickleness and lack of trust in the God of Israel, the words that struck me from this text this morning are John's response to the people asking him – what should we do? Which are words that I asked myself this week over and over again. Words that I believe our national and local leaders are also asking themselves – what should we, what can we do now.

And I hear in John's answer an answer for all of us as we go forward from this past week's events. As John responds:

If you have two coats give one to someone who has none.

If you have food share it with those who are hungry.

If you are in a position of authority and you have the responsibility of collecting taxes do not collect more than are required by the government.

If you have been given the authority by the government to maintain order, do not use your power to make threats or false accusations.

In other words, live the life that God has always intended for us. Be kind, be gracious, be fair, be honest, be compassionate. Live a life that restores, enhances and enriches the life and the livelihood of all the people that God has entrusted to our care.

So, even though the Jews didn't have the ability to overcome the Romans that were mistreating them, their marching orders from God through the words of John as this new age that was about to dawn, was to love and to care for one another.

Then this morning's text story proceeds with the arrival of

Jesus on the scene. He came not to preach or heal, but to unite with the people in this rite of baptism. His joining together with the people in this rite of baptism was followed by the voice of God saying, "this is my beloved Son with whom I am delighted."

And with those words the Spirit of the Lord descended upon Jesus in the form of the dove. And then filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is empowered to commence the work of fulfilling God's promise to the Israelites. Which is truly the dawning of a new day, a new age, a new way of being in relationship with one another and with God.

A new age:

Where we have been commanded by the Son of God to love our neighbors as ourselves.

A new age:

Where Jesus will model and teach us just how expansive and how radical that command is. As during his ministry, he will cross man-made boundaries to demonstrate for us radical

welcoming and acceptance of the
foreigner,

A new age:

Where we will hear of the
blessings that God has in store
for the least of these, for those
who have been taken advantage
of, and for those who have been
cast aside.

A new age:

Where we will hear of the
gracious forgiveness for
unthinkable insults, injuries and
offenses

And where we will hear of our
responsibility to speak truth in
love and hold people accountable
for the health and well-being of
our communities.

All of which have helped me
reflect on the question that has
been plaguing me all week.

Where do we go from here?

Where do we go from here is: We
roll up our sleeves and get back

to the Kingdom work that God
has called us and God's son
Jesus has taught us to do.

We work for the health, the
welfare and the safety of all of
God's children. We work with
our God given talents We work
with our neighbors. We work
with our resources.

We work diligently, tirelessly
and courageously to bring about
God's kingdom in our
neighborhoods, in our states, in
our country and here on this
Earth.

So that violence fueled by hate
as we witnessed this week will
be no more. And we and our
fellow man will live in the peace
of God that passeth all
understanding.

AMEN

Blessing

May
The love of God,
The light of Christ,
And the joy of the Holy Spirit
Abide with you on this day
and forever more.

AMEN