

Luke 3:1-6

¹In 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 Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene -- ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.** ³He went into all the country around the Jordan, **preaching a baptism of REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.** ⁴As 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.** ⁵Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. ⁶And all mankind will see God's salvation.'" (NIV)

INTRO - I'll begin in a different way. We are in the Advent Season preparing for Christmas. Christmas is about Jesus. We receive the Savior and worship Him. But, one of the best ways that we worship God, 'with all our heart soul and mind,' is when we 'love our neighbors like ourselves.' I want a chance to spend time visiting 'loving my neighbors. So, I'm inviting you all, the whole church, to an open house at our home again. On Wednesday after Christmas we invite all of you to come over to our new house and have some food, spend time, visit, and share. I'm inviting you all to an open house at our house, a way for God's people to spend time together.

We hope that we'll have a lot of people at our open house, so we'll do some preparing. Kathy will be cooking. We'll do some decorating. She'll probably even get me to do some cleaning. When you have people over there is preparation to do. When there's a lot of people, there's a lot of preparation.

I. In our lesson for today we hear about preparation.

A. John the Baptist was the fulfillment of a promise in the Old Testament.

1. Isaiah 40 tells of John's coming with the prophecy, "**A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.**

2. John was not God, but was there to call people to get ready for God's coming.

3. God uses John to call us to prepare for God's coming.

B. God has come to us in the birth of Jesus.

1. To a world of pain, and sorrow, and trouble, and death caused by sin, God came in the person of Jesus.

2. God wants us to receive Jesus who came at Christmas to save the world from sin, not only by His birth, but also by his death and resurrection.

3. In John God is calling us to prepare to receive Jesus in this coming.

C. God will come again to finally take His children out of this world of pain and trouble and death, when Jesus comes as Judge at the end of the world.

1. We are to prepare for the coming of Jesus as Judge.

2. God wants us to be among His children who receive eternal life.

D. For these reasons John calls us to 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'

II. Now, you know how we will prepare for the open house. We hope that you'll all accept our invitation. But, how does someone prepare to receive the Savior and Judge?

A. We have an explanation of how to prepare in this same lesson that calls for preparation.

1. We are told, **the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.**

³He went into all the country around the Jordan, **preaching a baptism of REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.**

2. In order to prepare for the coming Savior, John called the sinful people of his day to repentance.

B. The people of John's day were Israelites, the chosen people of God, they were waiting for the Savior, but there were conditions in the lives of God's people that would keep them, and actually did keep some of them from receiving the Savior.

1. These conditions were their selfishness, their lack of love for others, their greed.

2. These sins were even there in the lives of those called as God's people, and seeking God.
3. So Isaiah and John called the people to repentance.

A. **Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. ⁶ And all mankind will see God's salvation."**

B. This is a description of life where low times of sin are filled in with righteousness, and high places of pride are lowered with humility, and dishonest and crooked ways are changed.

C. The people were called to admit their sinfulness even though they were children of God.

D. The people were called to change their lives to serve God.

C. But the people were not just called to repent of their sins, but to receive the grace of God, in preparation for the receiving of His grace in the Savior.

1. We are told he was **preaching a baptism of REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.**

2. Forgiveness comes through faith, because we believe and trust it is from God, not ourselves.

3. This faith not only receives God's forgiveness, it receives Jesus as he comes as Savior, and as He comes as Judge.

III. The call is to us to prepare.

A. God calls us to repentance in preparation for Christmas, in preparation for Jesus to come as Judge.

1. Are there areas in your life where you allow behavior which God would call immoral? God calls for us to admit that sin, to be sorry for that sin, and to seek God's help to change it.

2. Are there areas of your life where you raise yourself up above God? God calls for humility and a willingness to raise God's will to what is most important.

3. Are there areas of your life that are not necessarily straight, or honest, or give a good witness, areas that need to be more straight forward, pointed toward God's direction and life? God calls for you seek a life of obedience, and integrity and to give a good witness to the Lord.

B. But, God also calls you, not just to repentance, but also to faith.

1. It may be hard to believe, but God in heaven actually cares about you.

2. God really did come to earth in His Son, Jesus, to love us. Believe his good news, and receive his grace.

3. God really does know your sins, but He offers you forgiveness as you admit your sins, and believe or Trust in His love in Jesus.

C. God not only calls us to repentance and faith, he prepares us for it.

1. Are you baptized? God forgives you and leads you to a life of repentance through Your baptism. God not only calls you to prepare for the coming of Jesus, but He does the preparation - if you will let Him.

2. God not only calls you to faith, but He creates faith by His Word, by His Spirit. The faith that receives the Savior is given by God - if you will let Him.

CONCLUSION - How are you preparing to receive God's coming at Christmas. Are you buying gifts? Sending cards? Receiving Guests? The best way to prepare for Christmas, for the coming of God, is GOD'S WAY, through repentance and through faith.