



## **Luke 3:1–6**

3 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 Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of

repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

“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 people will see God’s salvation.””

## **Reflection**

Luke began his Gospel with these words,

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

In the original language this is one single sentence; a sentence recognised by many Biblical scholars as perhaps the most per-

fect Greek sentence in the New Testament. With its style and eloquence Luke announces himself as not just a scholar, but also an historian, dedicating the work of history that will follow to a likely patron, Theophilus, with the intention of crafting ‘an orderly account’ that creates certainty in the mind of the hearer about the truth of Jesus Christ. Luke makes it very clear from the outset that he has carefully investigated everything from the beginning and that his biography of Jesus Christ is grounded in eyewitness facts. Luke’s Gospel is a work of history.

And so, time and time again, we will encounter passages like our passage today. Just listen to Luke the historian begin to unfold his narrative about the adult, John the Baptist. Reading from today’s passage,

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And with these words Luke is once again stressing to us that these events happened to real people in a real time and place in history. Jesus Christ was a real historical person. His life and teachings, death and resurrection are real historical facts, carefully investigated by Luke and verified by countless eyewitness accounts during the period of Luke’s research. And that is why,

for example, Luke begins speaking about the ministry of John the Baptist with this lengthy introduction,

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Following ancient historical conventions Luke names no less than seven rulers precisely dating and placing the ministry of John the Baptist, working down from the most comprehensive ruler (Tiberius Cae-

sar) to the regional spiritual leaders. And in so doing he directs his hearers to travel to the region, as no doubt he has done, to make further investigations for themselves. John's ministry certainly did not happen in a corner, verse three ...

3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

... and Luke is simply carefully fulfilling his stated aim of setting down all the facts so that readers of his work (like Theophilus and the early church and you and I today as well) might have certainty about the origins of the Christian faith.

Luke then moves from contemporary history, to Biblical pre-history of what is oc-



curing in all the country around the Jordan. And to do so he reaches back to the writings of the prophet Isaiah, who wrote around eight hundred years beforehand. To explain what is happening in the ministry of John the Baptist, Luke quotes Isaiah 40:3–5, a dramatic turning point in the book of Isaiah.

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And this dramatic turning point in the book of Isaiah also signals a dramatic turning point in the history of the world. Isaiah 40 begins with God pronouncing comfort to his people and in the coming of John the Baptist comfort will be announced to the entire world through one from the nation of Israel through whom all nations will be blessed. John will call out in the wilderness, the stamping ground of the great prophets of old,

Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.

The 'way of the Lord' (Jesus Christ) is heading to the Gentiles and many seemingly insurmountable obstacles will be overcome by him. Those seven rulers each in their

own way will be after Jesus' blood, both the five Romans and the two Jewish religious leaders – seemingly insurmountable foes when compared to the son of a rural carpenter and teenage girl from Nazareth. And yet the prophecy about Jesus continues,

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every mountain and hill made low.  
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6 And all people will see God's salvation.””

All people will see God's salvation. Tiberius Caesar and Herod the Great, all but forgotten. Pilate, Philip, Lysanias, Annas and Caiphas – forgotten. But Jesus' name

continues to grow and grow because, in him,

all people will see God's salvation

As we'll see tomorrow John would go on to preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins, tearing down obstacles in people's lives to receive Jesus. This is how John prepared the way for his Lord; and he prepared not just the Jewish nation but all-comers from every ethnicity and station in life. They were cut to the heart by his preaching and turned away from their sins – treacherous valleys filled in, rocky mountains flattened, crooked lives straightened and rough ways made smooth – all in preparation for receiving Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. A dramatic turning point in the history of the world is

here and it can only be embraced through a dramatic about-face in individual lives – turning away from sin and selfishness and back towards the God who offers us forgiveness in his Son.

## **Think & Pray**

Two thousand years on very little has changed. God's salvation is offered to all people in the person of Jesus Christ but in order to receive him as our Lord and Saviour we must first repent of our sins and turn away from ourselves to him. And the obstacles to do so today seem as big as ever. In some nations on earth it is still hostile rulers and powers. We think of Saudi Arabia, parts of Africa and the Middle East. Pray for these nations today that despite tyrants and despots all people in

these countries would see God's salvation in Jesus. But consider also the obstacles of our culture and our own hearts to Jesus. Are you walking a crooked path? Is your Christian journey far harder than it needs to be because you're trying to have it both ways? What inconsistencies in your life make being a Christian hard going? Are you trying to serve two masters who are at odds with each other?

Spend some time this morning preparing the way for the Lord in your life. What mountains need tearing down? What idols of our culture need to be destroyed? What treacherous valleys are you trying to navigate that need filling in through repentance and prayer. What is stopping you coming to Jesus with your whole heart and your whole life?

Spend some time now in reflection, repentance and prayer so that you can make straight paths for Jesus in your life this week.