

Chris Murphy

Jan. 11th 2026

Scripture: Luke 3: 1-22

Sermon Title: Preparing the Way of the Lord

Luke 3

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, 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, 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 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 coming out to be baptized by him, “You

brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8

Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and 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; therefore every tree that

does not bear good fruit will be 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,[a] 16 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 strap of his sandals. He will baptize you

with[b] 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.

The Baptism of Jesus

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;[c] with you I am well pleased.”[d] (This Is the Word of God)

Please pray with me...

Introduction:

Sing...

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord, Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Invite the congregation to join in.

This is the first main song of the movie *Godspell*, a modern retelling of the gospel story that became a huge hit in the 1970's. It is largely based on the parables of Matthew's gospel.

Godspell began as a project by drama students at Carnegie Mellon University and then moved to a Theatre Club in the East Village of Manhattan. The show was rescored for an off-Broadway production, which opened on May 17, 1971, and became a long-running

success. The movie Godspell came out in 1973. I remember watching the musical when I was a kid and then as an adult I took Karen to the see the musical and later showed the movie to my daughters. My daughter Cate wanted to see it during the Christmas season, so we watched a little of the movie again. It was fun to see how John the Baptist sings the song and people come from all over Manhattan to a big fountain in park where they play around getting baptized. Eventually Jesus shows up with his 70's afro and colorful clothes. Godspell provides a fun depiction of John the Baptist and Jesus, but when we read about John the Baptist in Luke's text, we might feel a mixture of emotions about John.

How do you feel about John the Baptist? Remember him. The son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the relative and friend of Jesus. John the Baptist who let his hair grow long, ate locusts and wild honey, and lived in the wilderness before coming into public's eye as a prophetic voice inviting people to repent.

Some thought John the Baptist was the Messiah, but he claimed to be the one called to prepare the way of the Messiah. His calling was to get people's hearts right, so that they would be ready for Jesus.

How do you feel about John?

Part of me is a little put off by John. He seems pretty intense, a bit too intense for my liking. I am not thrilled with his fiery judgment style. He seems to be a throwback to the Old Testament prophets with their strong words and fearful voices. People compared him to Elijah. I struggle with that style of communication. Of course, John did not appear to people in the 21st century. Nor did he come to the town of Newberg. He did not meet people along the shores of Yamhill River. He came to the River Jordan in the Galilee region of Israel. He was not European but a middle eastern Jewish man. He was part of a long line of prophetic voices who felt the need to speak truth to power and to humble the masses. It is okay if I am a little surprised by John's style.

So even though I am put off by John and his intense style, I wish to pause my judgement and see what he has to say to those of his time.

And what he says about repentance and right living is pretty compelling.

He tells the one with two coats to share with the one who has none.

He tells people to share their food with the hungry.

He tells tax collectors to only collect what is owed to them.

He tells the soldiers to not extort money and to be satisfied with their wages.

Now this John the Baptist I kind of like. I am impressed that he is bold and strong and calls people to repent and live with integrity and virtue.

I even find myself wanting to repent with the crowd and explore ways to get my heart right with God.

To help with the repentance process, John baptizes those who come to him. It is a baptism of water but he shares that one who is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Towards the end of our reading today the true Messiah shows up.

Jesus arrives and is baptized. John does not feel worthy to do it, but according to other gospels, John is the one who baptizes Jesus.

I am curious why John the Baptist was called to prepare the way of the Lord. Why didn't Jesus just show up and do his thing? Why did he need John to help him fulfill his ministry?

According to the gospels, John was part of the plan and the plan started back with his mom Elizabeth and Jesus' mom Mary. Have you ever seen how families sometimes connect together to do ministry? I notice this happening in our church. Some of you are here with your family or one of your relatives. I think of the Thurston,

Greenbaum, and Stiehler families who are related to each other and all are active in our church.

We really are a lot like Jesus. Just like how Jesus did ministry with the disciples and his relatives, so we do ministry with one another as a church family.

Jesus and John were relatives and friends and they both experienced similar struggles. They came proclaiming a message of love and light to a world that was struggling with corruption and oppression. Both faced opposition and even gave their lives out of love.

Today, we are invited to listen to John's message with fresh hearts. We are called to repent and humble ourselves before the Messiah Jesus, the Savior of the World.

How might we prepare our hearts for Jesus as we begin a new year?

Maybe that is the question we could ask John if he was here today.

John the Baptist, what shall we do to prepare our hearts for Jesus?

I wonder if John might give us similar advice.

Share with others your resources. Collect food and clothing and give to those that need it.

Stop being greedy when so many people have so little and could benefit from your generosity. Be grateful for what you have and do not covet what other people around you might enjoy. Treat people with dignity.

John would likely call us to get our heart rights with God. Stop trying to make it through live on your own. Instead of making life about yourself. Focus on the needs of others is what John might say to us.

Stay humble and lift up those around you. Guard your hearts and minds and focus them on God and God's values of love and compassion.

As I prayerfully ponder the life of John the Baptist, I am grateful for his part in the story of Jesus' life. He probably helped Jesus feel less alone. Jesus spoke of John in the highest regard. He said of John in

Matthew chapter 11 vs. 11, Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.

Jesus also spoke of John as a prophet called to prepare the way of the Messiah.

John was humble but Jesus knew that in his humility, John was very important as a prophet and as the one to prepare the way of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, the Kingdom of love.

John gives Jesus a great gift. When John reluctantly baptizes Jesus, the Holy Spirit appears like a dove and anoints Jesus. A voice from God tells Jesus that he is beloved.

This morning, I want to encourage us to listen to the wisdom of John the Baptist.

May we prepare our hearts for the presence of Jesus and his plan for us and our world in 2026.

I am not one for major new years resolutions, but maybe as we begin this new year, you may wish to repent or let go of habits that hinder

your openness to Jesus. If so, approach any efforts at self-growth with grace and gentleness. I know John can be pretty intense and sometimes we do need a wake up call in our lives, but my hope is that the story of John preparing the way is a reminder that as we open our hearts to Jesus and humble ourselves in repentance, we make space for grace and the words of encouragement. When Jesus humbled himself and was baptized, he received the news that he is beloved.

As we prepare our hearts for this coming year and all that Christ has planned, may we hear the same words that we are beloved of God and chosen by God for good things.

Rachel Held Evans who was a wonderful Christian teacher and author shared that baptism is a naming of ourselves as beloved children of God. The world around us may give us other identities. The world around us might say that we are not enough. But baptism reminds us that we are enough, that we are beloved children of God.

May this truth also encourage us as we begin this new year together. Yes, we need to repent and get our hearts right, but I first and foremost we need to hear the news that like Jesus we are beloved of God. Take some time on this Baptism of Jesus Sunday to remember your own baptism. If you have not been baptized, let me know and we will be happy to baptize you in one of our worship service or I could even take you to Yamhill River. The baptism of Jesus reminds us that we all need to hear that we are beloved children of God.

Let us pray...

In the Love of Jesus we pray, AMEN.