**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #6**

**The Kingdom, Baptism, Repentance, Mediation**

**Luke 3:1-22**

**John the Baptist declares the Kingdom**

***Luke 3:1*** *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysani as tetrarch of Abilene,* ***2*** *in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness;* ***3*** *and he went into the entire region about 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,*

*“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*

*‘Make ready the way of the Lord,*

*make straight the paths for him.’*

***5*** *Every valley shall be filled,*

*and every mountain and hill shall be brought low,*

*what is crooked shall be made straight,*

*and the rough ways must become smooth;*

***6*** *and all flesh (every human) shall see the salvation of God.’ ”*

**John’s preaching to the Jews**

***7*** *He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath that is coming?* ***8*** *Produce the fruits worthy of repentance, and do not start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*

***9*** *Even now the axe is laid to 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 crowd asked him, “What then shall we do?”*

***11*** *And he answered them, “He who has two tunics, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.”*

***12****Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”*

***13****And he said to them, “Collect nothing for yourselves, nothing beyond what is demanded.*

***14****Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Avoid extortion and blackmail and be content with your wages.”*

***15****As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John whether perhaps he were the Christ,* ***16****John answered them all, “I baptize you with water; but he who is more powerful than I is coming, I am not fit to unfasten even the strap of his sandals; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* ***17****His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.*

***18*** *So, with many other exhortations, John preached to the people.*

**Notes and studies**

1. “Tetrarch” is a title of a ruler who ruled over a fourth part of an area. Philip was the son of the Herod the Great.

2. Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene which was a territory north west of Damascus and the town of Ablia.

3. A word of God came to John just like Jeremiah (1:1).

4. The desert, in Matthew 3:1, was the Desert of Judea, round the river Jordan.

**Baptism of Repentance**

1. The Greek word for repentance is “Metanoia” a very good word, it means:
   1. Change of mind
   2. Change of life
2. In the OT “Repentance” is turning to God by avoiding sin (Isa 6:10; Ezek 3:19). Here washing with water marked returning to God.

**Dialogue with Philemon**

**On Repentance**

**George:** How do you understand the NT call for repentance?

**Philemon:** Many of us understand repentance just like the Moslems, that is, to stop or to abstain from evil. This is not a Christian teaching, for we repent because of our love for God. We truly abstain from sin and even from what is common to the human nature like hating those who hate us. bBut this is not what our Lord called us to do. Our Lord told us not to abstain from hating others but called us to love our enemies. Love is the way of our new life and St. John told us, “*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.  Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.*” (1 John 4:7-8)

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**The Way**

**Luke 3:4**  Quotes Isaiah (40:5) preparing for the Way of the Lord that is the Way of Jesus the oldest name for our Faith based on John 14:6 and repeated in Acts 22:4.

**The Crowd**

**Luke 3:7** The “crowd” or the multitude is the usual name for those who came to hear John, (See, Luke 5:1; 8:4, 19, 40; 9:37, 38; 22:47). “Broods of vipers” is used also in Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 22:33). The Greek name ***echidna*** is a name of poisonous snakes. It is a name that was used not in the OT or even in Rabbinic Writings.

**The Wrath**

The “Wrath that is coming” – “wrath” appears only here and in John 21:23. It is certainly the future manifestation of God’s “wrath.” It is God’s judgment of evil (See, Isa 13:9, Zeph 1:14-16; 2:2; Ezek 7:19).

**Luke 3:8**. “Fruit worthy of repentance” show your repentance by your actions.

“Children for Abraham from these stones” - Matthew Black says if this was delivered in Aramaic, children is ***benayya***, and stones is ***abnayya***, (See, Mathew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 145). This is a pun from John the Baptist.

**Luke 3:9** “The Axe” is that of Judgment and in the background the words of Isaiah 10:33-34, the coming Judgment. This may be what the Romans will do in the Year 70AD when the temple was demolished.

**Luke 3:10-13** John tells all how to lead a good life. As for the Tax collectors, their way was to exploit those who have to pay tax by adding to the tax their own cut. John was asking for what is just.

**Who were the soldiers?**

They were not from the Roman Legions, but Jews who were enlisted in the service of Herod (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18:5).

**The Preaching of the Coming Messiah**

**Luke 3:14-15** There was a high expectation of the coming of the Messiah. The title was used for King David as the Anointed One, who replaced King Saul (2 Sam 6:21). This title was used also in worship when the Psalms were sung in the Temple (Ps 18:51; 89:39, 52, 130:17).

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of King David, who will come to be the Shepherd of Israel (Jer 33:15; Ezek 37:23-24).

**Baptism with water; Baptism with the Holy Spirit and Fire**

John used imagery language from the agriculture life that was common to those who heard him.

1. A farmer during harvest will thresh, i.e., beat the grain in order to loosen the grain kernels from the surrounding stems and husks.

2. Then comes the winnowing, using a kind of wooden pitch fork (a winnowing fork) to throw the threshed grain heads into the breeze. The lighter chaff blows downwind, and the heavier grain kernels fall back to the ground, separating the two.

3. The floor would be "cleared" by threshing and then winnowing all the grain heads until the chaff and grain had been completely separated. The grain was then gathered into baskets and stored in the barn, but the remaining stems and husks piled together and set ablaze.

4. So we have one verb, the verb translated "clear" (NIV) or "purge" (KJV) is Greek ***diakathairo***. It means to "clean out, cleanse thoroughly." The idea of thoroughness and complete cleaning is contained in this compound verb. The verb is translated "unquenchable." The Greek ***asbestos*** is a mineral used by the ancients to be inextinguishable when set on fire. So the fire will continue till purgation takes place.

**Baptism with the Holy Spirit and Fire**

St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary of Luke*, Homily 10

John was saying, "I indeed baptize you in water: but He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire." And this too is of great importance for the proof and demonstration that Jesus is God and Lord. For it is the sole and peculiar property of the Godhead that transcends all, to be able to bestow on men the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and make those that draw near unto It partakers of the divine nature. But this exists in Christ, not as a gift received, nor by communication from another, but as His own, and as belonging to His Godhead: for "He baptizes in the Holy Spirit."

The Word therefore that became man is, as it appears, God, and the fruit of the Father's Godhead. He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit is the Word of God, and not He Who is of the seed of David. What answer shall we make, then, to this? Yes! We too affirm, without fear of contradiction, that the Word being God as of His own fullness bestows the Holy Spirit on such as are worthy: but this He still wrought, even when He was made man, as being the One Son with the flesh united to Him in an ineffable and incomprehensible manner. For so the blessed Baptist, after first saying, "I am not worthy to stoop down and loose the thong of His shoes," immediately added, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire;" plainly while having feet for shoes.

For no one whose mind was awake would say, that the Word, while still incorporeal, and not as yet made like unto us, had feet and shoes, but only when He had become a man. Inasmuch, however, as He did not then cease to be God, He wrought even so works worthy of the Godhead, by giving the Spirit unto them that believe in Him. For He, in one and the same person, was at the same time both God and also man.”

**Dialogue with Philemon:**

**On the fire of the Holy Spirit**

**George:** How do you understand the words of the apostle Paul “Don’t quench the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19)?

**Philemon:** In the Son of Songs Solomon must have sung, “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (8:7) and the same apostle Paul says, “The love of God has been shed like shedding blood by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). The Holy Spirit if the divine of fire that purifies us and cleanses us from all our filth. But when we misuse our freedom we pour out the cold water of our lusts on this fire. So the same apostle says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph 4:30).

**George:** Does the Holy Spirit depart from us when we sin?

**Philemon:** The words that we have just quoted say to us that we must not quench or grieve the Holy Spirit, so He stays in us in such a state, grieving and waiting for us to wake up.

**George:** But the Holy Spirit departed From King Saul

**Philemon:** Yes, but this was under the Old Covenant, but now we have our Mediator who has received the Holy Spirit for us, and promised to give the Spirit to us. Because of the Holiness of Jesus, the Holy Spirit remains with us and for us forever, (Jon 14:15-16)”

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**The Baptism of Jesus: the Beginning of the Ministry of the Mediator**

**Luke 3:21-22**

***21****When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.* ***22****And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”*

**Notes and studies**

1. Jesus was praying at his baptism. Luke did not record this prayer, but it marked the secret relationship between Jesus and His Father.
2. The prayer was answered, for the Holy Spirit came to dwell on Him. The Father declared his pleasure in his “Beloved Son.” This is an answer to the prayer.

**Why did Jesus accept Baptism?**

St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Arians*, 1:47

“He is anointed with the Spirit in His manhood to sanctify human nature. Therefore the Spirit descended on Him in Jordan, when in the flesh. And He is said to sanctify Himself for us, and give us the glory He has received.”

St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Adelphius*, 8)

“If the Logos were a creature, He would not assume the created body to quicken it. For what help can creatures receive from a creature? All created beings need salvation and cannot give salvation to each other. But since the Logos being Creator, has himself as the Creator made all creatures able to receive salvation, at the consummation of ages when He put on the creature, that He as the Creator might once more consecrate it, to recover it for new life.”

St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Arians 2:61*

“For though he became like us that He was made man for us, and our brother by similitude of body, still He is therefore called and is the “First-born” of us, because, all human beings lost according to the transgression of Adam, but the flesh of the Logos before all others was saved and liberated, as being the Logos’s body; and henceforth we, becoming incorporate with It, are saved after Its pattern.”

St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*

(English trans. J. A. McGuckin, 1995), pp 62-64

“He became man by appropriating a human body to himself … this is how he transmits the grace of Sonship even to us that we too can become children of the Spirit, insofar as human nature had first achieved this possibility in him.

“It seems to me that the divine Paul was meditating on such thoughts when he so rightly wrote: “For just as we have borne the image of that which is earthly so shall we bear the image of the heavenly, for the first man was from the earth and earthly, but the second is from heaven.” All those who belong to the earthly one bear the character of the earth, but all those who belong to the Heavenly One bear a heavenly character (cf. 1 Cor 15:47-49).

“We are earthly beings insofar as the curse of corruption has passed from the earthly Adam even to us and through our corruption the law of sin entered in the members of our flesh. Yet we become heavenly beings, receiving this gift in Christ. He is from God, from on high and naturally God, yet he came down to our condition in a strange and most unusual manner, and was born of the Spirit, according to the flesh, so that we too might abide in holiness and incorruptibility like him. Clearly grace came upon us from him, as from a new rootstock a new beginning.”

**Dialogue with Philemon:**

**On Christ the Mediator**

**George:** How do you understand the work of Christ our Lord as the Mediator between us, and God the Father?

**Philemon:** Throughout my life, I have noticed that many of our brothers and sisters like to treat Christ our Beloved as an “outsider,” I mean someone who lives in heaven and from time to time he looks down at us when we are in trouble. The NT declares the opposite: Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, he is the head of the body and we are the members of his body, and St. Paul says, *“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church”* (Eph. 5:9). I think that it is our sins that plant in us this sense of alienation. We forget that Jesus our Beloved is the very life of our flesh and spirit. Jesus is my new being. This new being has no life in itself. Its life is the shared life that the Lord gives to us from the time of our faith to eternity. Jesus is here (Philemon was holding his hand and was pointing to his feet). There is no space for anyone else, not even to me to exist except in Jesus. If I have anything that does not belong to Jesus, it will perish.

**George:** So, what happens if you sin? (Philemon laughed.)

**Philemon:** There are people who like you think that if you sin you are no longer in the Lord or that the Lord has departed from them. The NT does not give us a single image – not one – of Jesus running away from sinners. I just told you that Jesus is the head of his body and no head ever existed without its body. When we sin, we turn the whole of our being to the self. We become locked into what lust and the imagination can create. But don’t ever think that your new being has been damaged or came under the power of death. Jesus our Savior lifted the curse of death forever. It can’t come back or be imposed on us by the Father. God is not inconsistent like us: when He sees a change in us, He doesn’t change His love. Perish the thought.

**George:** How do you understand that at his baptism our Lord received the Holy Spirit?

**Philemon:** Jesus my Beloved knows how fickle is our nature. He took this nature and sanctified it in his Person. So for the first time the Holy Spirit sees a Holy Human who has been appointed by the Father as the head of a new creation. The Spirit comes and rests on Jesus with pleasure. If the Father said this is my beloved Son in whom I have pleasure, then the Holy Spirit who came as a dove and rested on Jesus had also the same pleasure. Since then, we receive the Holy Spirit from our Mediator as he himself said, that the Father will send the Holy Spirit in his name (Jn 14:26). Fear not, because of the Mediator the Holy Spirit rests on Jesus to rest on us.”

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***Pope’s Notes***

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