



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

# LifeGroup

February 25, 2024

Luke 3:7-9 and Luke 3:21-22

By today’s standards, John the Baptist would have been called an eccentric hermit living alone out in the desert. His clothes of camel hair and his diet of locusts and wild honey would certainly have led anyone to that conclusion. Add to that his message of God’s impending judgment and his call for people to repent, and it might be hard to see why people took the trouble to find him. Something in his message must have resonated, something that was different from what they had heard before.

In this text, we find John chastising the crowd that came to be baptized. He questions their motives for coming to him, and challenges them to look within themselves. John wants them to experience a heart change, not just an easy way to be saved.

“Radical” seems to be an appropriate word. When John arrived on the scene, he embodied the idea of radical from head to toe. His call to a different way of life cut deeply into the comfortable lives the people had assumed. Luke portrays John’s ministry as a radical call to repentance, summed up in the Greek word *metanoia*, which literally means “change of mind.” *Metanoia* is turning 180 degrees to go another way. It’s a U-turn in the spiritual sense. It is turning from one thing or another back to God. John’s call was to turn toward God, to let the waters of baptism cleanse the people being baptized and prepare them for mission. To be prepared for God’s salvation, hearts must be opened to God’s message.

Darrell Bock, a commentator for the NIV Bible study series, writes: “... that this is John’s thrust can be seen in his exposition of repentance in Luke 3:10-14, where it is defined not as an abstract act of the mind, but as something that expresses itself in action.” (from *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*. Darrell Bock, Zondervan.)

## Community

*Welcome each other and spend some time catching up.*

### THEME FOR TODAY

At the baptism of Jesus, his public ministry begins. He is the “root;” the one into whom we are grafted in our own baptism.

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

There are many today who just don’t understand what’s going on when people (infants or adults) are baptized. If we go through the motions of baptism without any understanding of what God is up to, then we are like those whom John referred to as a “brood of vipers.” Our naïveté could be deadly.

A general framework for understanding this is the ABCs: adoption, birth, community. Baptism is God’s adoption of us. God is the actor (Ezekiel 36). God is the one who initiates this relationship. God then calls us to new life, which comes about through another birth.

We’re called to live into and out of this reality in the community of faith where how we live impacts others. We’re never alone; we belong to a community of the faithful.

We are grafted into Christ in baptism. This is the framework of our new relationship with him, and we are called to be “little Christs” in the world.

### **WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?**

Let’s begin each day with the reminder that baptism is God’s claim on our lives. How about every time we turn on the water, we say, just under our breath, “God has chosen me for mission in the world!” Every time we turn on the water, step into the shower, fill up a glass, take a drink, wash our hands, do the dishes, brush our teeth, brew some coffee, boil some water, say out loud, “God has chosen me for mission in the world!”

### **INTRODUCTION**

A young couple holding their first child is standing at the front of the sanctuary beside the baptismal font. They are beaming with joy at the blessing of a child in their lives, but they’re also a little nervous, since this is the busiest service and they are standing in front of a lot of people they don’t know. All sorts of thoughts rush into their heads as both parents hope their baby will not make too much of a fuss or do anything embarrassing when the pastor pours water on her head, blessing her as she is baptized.

The couple takes comfort as they look around to see their parents and family standing with them. However, that gets them Thinking about why they are here. Both of them had been baptized and, while they haven’t regularly attended services, there was something tugging at their hearts to want this for their child. They also recall both of their parents encouraging them to have the baby baptized, so they know they are doing the right thing. They went to the baptism class. Yet, they still wonder what all this really means.

### **ICEBREAKER**

What is your earliest memory of baptism? What, and to whom, was the most profound promise you’ve ever made and kept? Why was that promise so important to you? What motivated you to keep (and follow through on) that promise?

### **PRAY TOGETHER**

God, you initiate this relationship we have in baptism. You seek us and find us. You make promises to us and you keep your promises. You are the one who forgives sin and initiates faith. We thank you for your awesome love and amazing grace. Amen.

### **Content**

*(Read Luke 3:7-9 and Luke 3:21-22.)*

### **DISCUSSION**

What do you think the crowd’s reaction was to John calling them a brood of vipers? What was John referring to when he said “flee from the coming wrath”? Do you think those comments apply to us? If so, in what way?

What is your experience with adoption? How would you describe the journey of the adoptive parents leading up to an adoption? What is it like for an adopted child to settle into his or her family situation? How is it possible to be reborn? Can you share a personal experience? Why is community so important to a baptized person? Where do you find your community?

### *Application*

Brainstorm together about the number of times you will encounter water during the coming week and write them down. Every time we take a drink, wash our hands, see the ocean, etc. Continue to create this list together. Then, every time you encounter water this week, say to yourself, "God has chosen me for mission in the world!"

### **PRAY TOGETHER**

Lord God, we thank you for your patience with us, and your willingness to keep reminding us of the beginnings we face each day with you. You have given each of us gifts and passions to be used in mission for the world. Help us understand our calling more clearly and open our hearts to your action in our life. As you work in us, also work through us and fuel our actions with the love and compassion you have placed within us. Amen.

### **LifeGroup Readings for February 25, 2024**

Luke 3:7-9 NLT When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? (8) Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. (9) Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

Luke 3:21-22 NLT One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, (22) and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."