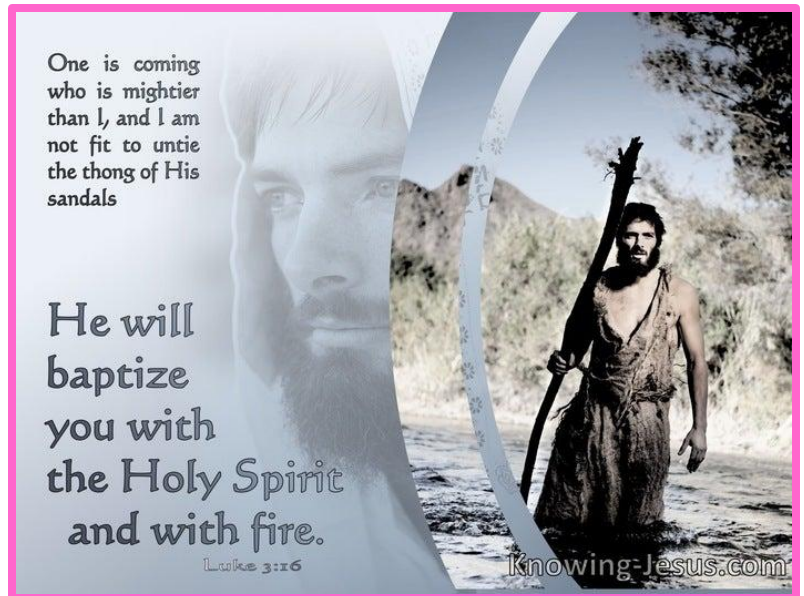


December 12, 2021
3rd Sunday of Advent
Luke 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What then should we do?" He said to them in reply, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it that we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages."



Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan 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." Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

Background

In Luke's gospel, John is associated with the Old Testament prophets to prepare for the coming of the messiah. One of the expectations at the time was that a messiah would bring a political transformation. John too looks for a Messiah who will come with the Holy Spirit and fire. He will bring judgment and usher in a new age that would be free from Roman domination. But as Luke records John's message, the political hope of freedom from Rome is restrained. Perhaps this is because he does not want the Roman authorities to view the early Christians as a threat to their authority.

Three times the question is asked of John, "What should we do?" John is calling everyone to repentance, a repentance that is demonstrated by a change in how one lives. John does not suggest that people join his austere life in the desert, but rather make changes in their daily life to keep it honest. Each time John is asked, "what should we do," his response indicates that they should live out their given role in society, being faithful to their responsibilities and considerate of others, and not taking advantage of their positions.

Luke understands that John's call to prepare for the coming reign of God is addressed to everyone, not just the religious faithful. Luke is making sure his audience is aware that even tax collectors and soldiers were responding to John's call to conversion. The fact that John was instructing them as to how they should behave also suggests that their conversion had awakened in them a sincere effort to live differently. The tax collectors of the day were more like toll collectors that would collect a fee as people and goods would pass their post. Often they were people who could not find other types of work, and they were forced by circumstance into this way of supporting themselves. They collected a fee as people and goods were crossing roads or bridges, or entering the city gates. The soldiers were guards who were assigned to protect the tax collectors. Both were despised because they were aiding an occupying Roman government.

Reflection Questions

Have there been times in your life when you felt a need to express your desire to make a significant change in the way you lived? What do you remember about the awareness? What did you do to express that desire?

1. In the second part of today's gospel Luke states, "Now the people were filled with expectation." Recall times in your life when you have been filled with expectation.
2. Can you also recall times when you lived without hope or expectation?
3. Who are the people around you who seem to live without expectation?
4. How are the people in your community offering a sense of hope?
5. If John the Baptist were alive today and you asked him, "what should I do," what do you think he would say?
6. Of all the people who were coming to John for baptism, why would Luke single out soldiers and tax collectors?
7. John seems to know himself and who he is not. He also asks people to live within the limits of their life. Can you talk to God about your desire to authentically live your life, or some other aspect of your present life that this gospel touches?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.
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