

Now is the Time!

1. Read — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:

2. Meditate — Now begin to reflect on the verses and ask God what it means and how he wants to speak to you through the passage. **God what are you saying to me through this?**

3. Pray — Respond from your heart to what God has been saying to you. **What do you want me to know?** Write down your prayer to him or record whatever he says to you.

4. Contemplate — Be quiet before the Lord enjoying His presence.
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**How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?**

- [1] Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary, pg. 131
- [2] Catechism of the Catholic Church - 776
- [3] Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary, pg. 131
- [4] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41
- [5] Catechism of the Catholic Church - 720
- [6] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41
- [7] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41 [8] Phil. 1:9-10
- [9] John Paul II, Parc des Princes, 1 June 1980
- [10] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41
- [11] St. Bernard, Sermon 3, Christmas Eve, 10

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# Quick Connect

**What is the Gospel saying? Luke 3:1-6** — Pg. 1

**What is the Church saying Past and Present?** Pages 1-3

**What is God saying to you through this passage?** Page 4

## **Gospel Reading – Luke 3:1-6 – Roman Missal**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: *A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

## **Spiritual Reading – Office of Readings – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent - Cycle C** From a commentary on Isaiah by Eusebius of Caesarea, bishop *The voice in the wilderness*

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God. The prophecy makes clear that it is to be fulfilled, not in Jerusalem but in the wilderness: it is there that the glory of the Lord is to appear, and God's salvation is to be made known to all mankind. It was in the wilderness that God's saving presence was proclaimed by John the Baptist, and there that God's salvation was seen. The words of this prophecy were fulfilled when Christ and his glory were made manifest to all: after his baptism the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove rested on him, and the Father's voice was heard, bearing witness to the Son: This is my beloved Son, listen to him. The prophecy meant that God was to come to a deserted place, inaccessible from the beginning. None of the pagans had any knowledge of God, since his holy servants and prophets were kept from approaching them. The voice commands that a way be prepared for the Word of God: the rough and trackless ground is to be made level, so that our God may find a highway when he comes. Prepare the way of the Lord: the way is the preaching of the Gospel, the new message of consolation, ready to bring to all mankind the knowledge of God's saving power. Climb on a high mountain, bearer of good news to Zion. Lift up your voice in strength, bearer of good news to Jerusalem. These words harmonize very well with the meaning of what has gone before. They refer opportunely to the evangelists and proclaim the coming of God to men, after speaking of the voice crying in the wilderness. Mention of the evangelists suitably follows the prophecy on John the Baptist.

### **Call to Conversion – Lesson and Discussion**

*“Prepare the way of the Lord”*

John begins his mission by calling upon everyone to prepare the way of the Lord. He instructs us to have our hearts and minds ready to receive the Messiah who is already among us to bring the Kingdom of God.

**What is “conversion”?** Conversion can be defined as “any turning or changing from a state of sin to repentance, from a lax to a fervent way of life, from unbelief to faith, and from a non-Christian religion to Christianity. Since the Second Vatican Council the term is not used to describe a non-Catholic Christian becoming a Catholic. The preferred term is ‘entering into full communion with the Church.’”[1]

**How would someone already in full communion with the Church have a conversion?** It is within the Church, because of her teachings, Sacraments, moral life, liturgy, and prayer, that intense change and perfection of the soul can occur. The Church is the hospital for sinners. When a person is physically ill, much can be done within the person’s home to make them well. If they are in need of the hospital, much can be done within the ambulance to make them well, but it is at the hospital that they can get the care they need. When a person is spiritually ill, much can be done through the natural virtues and God’s means of extraordinary graces, but the soul gets the care it needs within the Church through the theological virtues and the ordinary means of graces which God offers through the Church, which is the instrument Our Lord established for the salvation of men. The Church is Christ’s “‘instrument for the salvation of all,’ ‘the universal sacrament of salvation,’ by which Christ is ‘at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God’s love for men.’ The Church ‘is the visible plan of God’s love for humanity,’ because God desires ‘that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit.’”[2]

**What does it mean to be “converted”?** “One who with the help of divine grace undergoes a significant spiritual change for the better. In all cases the change must be deeply interior and represent a change of mind and heart to qualify as a true conversion.”[3] “To be converted means to purify oneself from sin, straighten crookedness of heart and mind, shore up the sinking ground of inconstancy and caprice, knock down pretenses of pride, conquer the resistance of selfishness and destroy acrimony in our relations with our neighbor: it means, in short, to make our life a straight path which leads to God without crookedness or compromise.”[4]

As we undergo the spiritual change of conversion, we conform more to the Divine likeness, which is what John the Baptist’s preaching ushers in. “Finally, with John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to man of ‘the divine likeness,’ prefiguring what he would achieve with and in Christ. John’s baptism was for repentance; baptism in water and the Spirit will be a new birth.”[5] It is not enough to be physically born;

we must reach our full physical potential. In the same manner it is not enough to be spiritually born, we must reach our full spiritual potential, which is being restored to the divine likeness from which and for which we were created.

**Can a person have more than one conversion?** Yes, in fact, we are called to do so! With each conversion, rather than returning to the same spot we were once at, we become closer to the heart of God. “It is not a program to be exhausted in one Advent, but one which is to be carried out every Advent in a new and deeper way in order to make ourselves more ready for the coming of our Savior.”[6]

**What are the responsibilities for personal conversion?** Besides our personal growth towards Christ it, “also includes the duty of working for the good of one’s brothers and of the community; such is the conclusion we should draw from the second reading.”[7] Saint Paul rejoices with the Philippians when they began to spread the Gospel. Likewise, Christ will rejoice with us the more we spread the saving faith in Him, because we, in turn, grow deeper and deeper in love with Him. “And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in the knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ...”[8]

**How does one have a conversion?** As Blessed Pope John Paul II said we must, “Open the gates wide to Christ! Take the risk of following him. Obviously this demands that you should come out of yourselves, or your own way of reasoning, or your prudence. It demands that you leave behind your indifference, your self-sufficiency, those un-Christian habits that you have perhaps acquired. Yes; that demands renunciation, a conversion, which first of all you must want to want; want to pray for in your prayer, and want to put into practice. Let Christ be for you the way, the truth, and the life. Let Him be your salvation and your happiness. Let him take over the whole of your life so that with Him you can live it in all its dimensions. Let all your relationships, activities, feelings, thoughts, be integrated in Him, or, so to speak, ‘Christified’. I wish that with Christ you may come to recognize God as the beginning and end of your existence.”[9]

“However we need to remember that our personal salvation and that of others is much more the work of God than of man. Man must collaborate diligently, but it is God who both begins the good work and carries it to completion. It is only with the help of grace that man can be rich ‘with the harvest of justice’ on the final day, because justice, that is, holiness, is acquired only ‘in Christ Jesus’ by opening oneself with humility and trust to his sanctifying action.”[10] God is both our beginning (Our Creator) and our end (Our Beatitude). It is God, as Saint Thomas Aquinas prays, who “points out the beginning, directs the progress, and brings about the completion”. This is similar to a spiritual GPS, which acquires satellites to find the beginning, direct progress, and keep the destination always in focus in order to bring about the completion.