

## Passing Through the Water

Luke gives us the most detailed record of the birth of Jesus. Luke also records the events of an annual Passover trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. Then Luke pauses his record until it is picked up again in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter.

Before we start looking at our scripture for this morning, let's take a few minutes to review the timeline of events (both secular and Biblical). We will move rather quickly through these dates but they will be available on line and they may help us to better understand the timing of the events mentioned in our reading.

Caesar Augustus became emperor of Rome in 31 BC and reigned until AD 14. Quirinius became a magistrate in Rome around 15 BC. He progresses in his career by becoming governor of Crete and Cyrene a year later. In 5 BC, he became governor of Pamphylia and Galatia. It was approximately this time when he called for a census to be used for purposes of taxation. This is our background for the secular timeline.

Herod the Great was able to remain as king over Judah while appeasing the Romans. He was the king during the census of Quirinius. Jesus is born between 6 and 4 BC. The magi visit (Matthew 2:1-12) in 4 BC. Herod died in the spring of 4 BC. At the time of his death, Jesus was either 1 or 2 years old.

We now have some background timing and events that were taking place as we consider the first few chapters of Luke. We recently covered the births of John and Jesus. John had a mission that was clearly stated at the time of his birth.

**“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; to give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79 NASB)**

In chapter 3, of Luke, John begins to preach the message of preparation and repentance. As we read from his message, we note two things. First, tact was not a major concern. John was speaking the truth to the crowd and he addressed them as he found them. Second, his call for repentance was for a change in their actions and attitude. Repentance was not and is not crying ‘I’m sorry’ it requires a change from doing the actions that violate God’s will.

So, he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. (Luke 3:7-8 NASB)

We may also note that we cannot depend on family ties or history to secure our relationship with God.

The crowd hears John and began to ask if he was the promised Messiah.

Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Luke 3:15-17 NASB)

We are told that John continued to preach and baptize people. We are not told how long his ministry lasted. Based on the Jewish historian, Josephus, his ministry lasted at least 6 years. He

was imprisoned and executed for his open criticism of Harold's adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. While John was still preaching and baptizing, Jesus came to him.

**Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."**

**(Luke 3:21-22 NASB)**

The Prince of Peace is baptized and God is pleased. At times, it seems, that we don't spend much time talking about baptism. The contact with water is a recurring theme we find throughout the Bible. In some church buildings, the baptismal font is placed near the entrance to the sanctuary as a symbol that entrance into the church is through baptism.

From the very creation, water was an important part. After God created light (day one), we read: **Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. (Genesis 1:6-8 NASB)**

The earth was totally inundated with water and God called for the water to be separated. The earth passed through the waters as the heavens were lifted above the earth. For those who missed the recent studies on heaven, this is the first heaven. This is where the weather is. The blanket of moisture (water) that forms a barrier from harmful solar and cosmic radiation. God assigns water an important role in His creation.

Later, when the earth was filled with evil, God cleansed it through water (Genesis chapters 6-8). This cleansing of the earth is mentioned again in 1 Peter 3:20-21 and is linked to baptism.

**...who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (1 Peter 3:20-21 NASB)**

Later, when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, we see that they had to pass through the Red Sea.

**Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters *were like a wall* to them on their right hand and on their left. (Exodus 14:21-22 NASB)**

The image that we can see, from this description, is that of walking through a path with walls of water in either side. Paul uses this image to once more suggest the passing through the water is somehow the image of baptism.

**For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; (1 Corinthians 10:1-2 NASB)**

When the children of Israel arrived at the Jordan River and crossed into the Promise Land, they again walked through the water to pass into the land that had been promised. Their arrival and entry onto the land involved their passing through the water (Joshua 3:13-16).

As we see, each time God provides either a new world, a cleaned world, a deliverance from slavery, the entry into the Promised Land; there is water there to cleanse, to separate and to mark the beginning of a new era for the people of God. Jesus speaks of water when He talked with

Nicodemus. We remember that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of John, Jesus told Nicodemus that our entry into the kingdom of God requires that we be born again. Nicodemus asked about this new birth and Jesus replied: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:5 NASB)

When Adam and Eve stepped on the earth, they were walking on a planet that had been through the water and was now, by the hand of God, ready for His purpose. When Noah and his family stepped out of the ark, they walked on the earth that had been cleansed by the waters. When Moses and the children of Israel walked through the Red Sea, they passed through the waters to escape their enslavement in Egypt.

When Jesus came to John and was baptized, He marked a new era of God dealing with mankind. This era is one in which we, through Jesus have forgiveness of sins and become children of God. Jesus spoke of a birth that was of water and the Spirit. Jesus shows us this symbolic passing through the water when He was baptized by John.

Have we passed through the waters so that we may leave our bondage to sin behind? Have we passed through the waters so that we may enter the promises of God?