

# Third Sunday of Advent, Year C, Gospel

## COMING FULL CIRCLE

Luke 3:7-18

Third Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Mark A. Marius

7John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 9Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

10And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" 11In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." 12Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" 13John said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." 14Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

15As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17With a winnowing

fork in hand, he will clear the threshing floor and gather the wheat into his granary, burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

18So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.



**From Dictionary.com:**

**re** – *preposition* Chiefly Law and Commerce  
*In the case of, with reference to; in re.*

## **DIAGNOSIS: Advent: RE: John the Baptist**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Resistance***

Is John the Baptist a resister to the practice of the day? He certainly has some choice words for the powerbrokers: Herod and the religious elite. His proclamation will soon put him behind bars. His cry in the wilderness gets our attention. Maybe we are not as great as we had hoped. Maybe we have resisted God. If something is coming, we had better pay attention.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Repentance***

What then should we do? We can't just sit around and relax (do nothing). Give us a regulation (law) to follow. So John tells us what he knows of God's rules: Care for others, bear good fruit. This is what God requires of us. But our real conundrum is that if we focus our effort on avoiding the axe coming for us, we are unable to bear good fruit. Our repentance still needs some fire power.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Reckoning***

Unfortunately, what John prescribes is still not enough; repentance may serve a purpose, but it alone can't get us right

with God. John confesses that he is only able to get us wet. But the fire is still coming and the axe will eventually strike us all. Whether we are trees or snakes, God's judgment will reduce us to ashes.

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## **Re: origin & history**

– *prefix meaning “back to the original place, again,” also with a sense of “undoing,” c.1200, from O.Fr. and directly from L. re- “again, back, against.”*

## **PROGNOSIS: RE: The Messiah**

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## ***agnosis (Eternal Solution): Redemption***

Good news? What is so good about this Messiah who comes with

fire? Redemption. John tells us, this is what the Messiah is going to do for us. His fire will finally separate us from our chaff, or sin, as he receives the axe and the fiery wrath we deserve. We may not realize this at his birth but we will at his resurrection. The cross of Christ refines our lives so that what God declares as good fruit remains.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Restoration***

We can now be mindful that, because of Christ, God is only interested in collecting our wheat and not our sin. The baptism that the Messiah brings allows our full restoration. The water, with the Word (Jesus), has the fire power that re-ignites our lives with God's love. Fleeing from God's ire is replaced by our running to God's righteousness.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Rejoicing***

And so as we get closer to coming full circle we can truly rejoice. With hope we not only anticipate the coming of the Messiah, we also reveal him to others. We bring our rejoicing into the wilderness of our world to reclaim it for Christ by re-telling the good news. John's exhortations are no longer received as requirements but as grateful responses for all God has done for us.