

Second Sunday in Advent

UNDER RECONSTRUCTION IN ADVENT

Luke 3:1-6

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

1In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

*“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.*

*5Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;*

6and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ‘

DIAGNOSIS: Unequal Paths

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Mountains and Valleys*

There are mountains on the horizon, many of them with names: Tiberius, Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysania, Annas, Caiaphas. We could just as well add some more from our own era. These seem to stand above the crowd. Valleys also exist, sometimes in the histories and resumés of the mountains themselves (though those are often concealed), often in the peoples over whom they rule (though they don't want others to think so of them). You and I are part of the landscape, with peaks and dips of our own. How high can we rise? How low can we go?

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Crooked and Rough Spirits*

We've only just scratched the surface. When examined a little closer, there are deeper problems. There are cracks and crevices, crooked and rough places, in the very hearts of the people dotting the landscape. This is not just a little fixer-upper project. The problem runs deep in our souls.

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Sins*

Enter John the Baptist, messenger of God, coming with even more daunting credentials according to Malachi ("refiner," "fuller's soap," "purifier"). Or maybe it's not John. Maybe it's the One for whom John is just a forerunner. However it is understood, it presents a stern and difficult challenge for the landscape. The surface just does not measure up to God's specks. It is laden with "sins" that need addressing. And as Malachi queries, "who can endure the day of his coming?" The construction of God is coming on to the scene, and it isn't going to be pretty.

PROGNOSIS: Leveling the Surface

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Forgiveness*

But here's the great "Ah-ha"! The One who comes after John, Jesus the Christ, Whom John pronounces and seeks to prepare the way, is himself the One who takes the baptism of repentance for our forgiveness straight to the Management in charge of

construction! Enduring the cross, he gets the surface leveled—per the Boss’s instructions—by getting himself leveled for us. Call it the re-construction of the promise, re-constructing us with his new pathway!

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Straight and Smooth Spirits*

Trusting this re-construction taking place, our spirits straighten out as our ears perk up. Repentant in spirit, we are restored to a smooth ride that brings comfort and joy—getting not what we deserve, but letting all our wickedness go with the One who comes for us, taking on his fresh new landscaping as our own.

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Full-filled*

Before you know it, we’re donning our own hardhats and rolling up our sleeves to help level the playing field. Joining John and Jesus are a host of those named in our era as in eras past, all for the care and redemption of all that God has made. Caring for the creation, we seek to redesign the landscape so that equality has a greater place. Redeeming the creation, as Jesus has done, we look to carry his mercy and forgiveness to all who long to see the day of “the salvation of God.” There’s nothing to hide, but plenty to do. But how wonderful the road of Advent, and where it all leads!