

Conversations on
Luke 3:7–18

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Watch the final scene from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1966; unrated). Discuss: How might the world be transformed by people’s hearts growing bigger? What in Luke 3:7–18 suggests this kind of transformation?

WHAT is important to know?

Ultimately, Luke summarizes John’s message as good news (*euangelizō*), thereby including it within the good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Indeed, John’s is not a separate message from that which Christ preached. Before one can receive the Spirit, before one can understand that Christ is Messiah, one must repent from self-sufficiency. Repentance is defined as humble obedience, the natural result of meeting with God and accepting the truth of the gospel. Consistently throughout Scripture, God called his people to repent, a call still resonating. John, as prophet to Jesus, teaches that repentance entails a life characterized by honesty and concern for those in need. (*Mariam J. Kamell*)

- ✠ Where is the “good news” in this Scripture passage?
- ✠ What does it mean to “repent from self-sufficiency”?
- ✠ Why is this repentance necessary to recognize the Messiah?

WHERE is God in these words?

The Advent passage reminds us of the strange figure of the Baptist, who took the advent of the Messiah so dead seriously that nothing less than complete *metanoia* with an ethical U-turn was required. At the same time, the Advent passage presents to us the desert preacher who tied the advent of the Messiah to the eschatological advent of God. To that context belongs the promise of the baptism with the Spirit and fire. It is going to be an eschatological Spirit baptism. Whatever else the Spirit baptism may mean, in this passage it is a judging and cleansing act. (*Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen*)

- ✠ What are the theological implications of John’s serious consideration of the advent of the Messiah?
- ✠ What is significant about tying “the advent of the Messiah to the eschatological advent of God”?
- ✠ How in Luke 3:7–18 is the advent of the Messiah tied to the eschatological advent of God?
- ✠ In what ways is the Spirit baptism a “judging and cleansing act”?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

John calls the good works that make hearers worthy of their baptism “fruit” borne from the tree of their lives. It is not enough lazily to claim oneself the fruit of Abraham (or of the Roman army). It is not enough to presume that because one is a child of the church, a “good citizen,” or a person of status one is secure before God. Don’t confuse sitting on the limb with being either the tree or its fruit. For the tree might not be so strong or fruitful as one thinks. (*Wesley D. Avram*)

- ✠ What are examples of the “‘fruit’ borne from the tree” of our lives?
- ✠ What are examples of people of faith “sitting on the limb”?
- ✠ Why do some “confuse sitting on the limb with being either the tree or its fruit”?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

The preacher might ask fellow worshipers, “Can anyone tell, by observing our lives, that we bear the mark of Christ and are living as his faithful disciples?” We must, according to John, live the faith we claim to possess. Authentic Christian living always has that challenge. “It’s your *life* that must change, not your skin. . . . What counts is your life” (vv. 8–9, *The Message*). While this may not be the challenge worshipers have come to hear in Advent worship, it is what John the Baptist offers. (*Kathy Beach-Verhey*)

- ✠ How is the mark of Christ evident in your life? In the life of your congregation?
- ✠ How can you more boldly live the faith that you claim to possess?

Holy One, thank you for your challenge to us today. May we feel your presence in our lives as we seek to live the faith we claim to possess. Amen.