

*Mal. 3:1–4*  
*Luke 1:68–79*  
*Phil. 1:3–11*  
*Luke 3:1–6*

## Preparing the Way

### Goal for the Session

*Youth will be challenged by the story of John the baptizer to seek forgiveness from God and dare to prepare the way of the Lord.*

## ■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

### Focus on Luke 3:1–6

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Mariam J. Kamell

This baptism is one of preparation for the impending judgment, an acceptance that repentance alone—not status, blood, or ritual—can bring about forgiveness when the judgment arrives. In Luke’s setting, then, John’s baptism is the preparation for the ministry, life, and death of Jesus, because those who accept John’s call show themselves humble before God and willing to submit to God’s word, ready to acknowledge the Messiah of the Lord. The first step in preparing for the coming of the Lord is repentance from sins, a message that reverberates from the Hebrew prophets and is highly relevant to the Advent season.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

The Advent Sunday message is linked with the final advent of eschatological salvation, which includes not only the chosen nation but also the nations. At the day of Pentecost to which our text also points, the Spirit was poured out on “all flesh” as an anticipation of the final salvation. A key theological theme in Luke is the inclusion of all in God’s salvific invitation and reaching out: both men and women, poor and rich, Gentiles and Jews. This Advent Sunday is a great place for us to be reminded of that.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Wesley D. Avram

The warrant for John’s ministry, from Isaiah 40, reinforces this imperative in its own way. The voice in the wilderness cries out for the way of God to be prepared with relentless urgency. This urgency can be heard as a call to rhetorical sensitivity among those who proclaim the word of faith. Here is dramatic imagery for making connection, for finding available means to communicate so that God’s desire for creation might be known: straightened paths, valleys and mountains made into plains, rocky ways made even (Isa. 40:4–6).

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Kathy Beach-Verhey

John did understand how a people ought to welcome their God. His challenging words called people to self-examination, along with a “to do” list, if they were going to be ready to receive the one coming after him. John’s prophetic message called people to get ready to receive Jesus. John’s challenge is to repent and prepare. True repentance (*metanoia* in the Greek) means literally to change one’s mind, turn around, reorient oneself. John calls all people to turn to God and from sin, to seek God’s forgiveness, and to prepare the way of the Lord.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

*Luke 3:1–6*

## Focus on Your Teaching

December is a busy month for everyone, including young people. There are gifts to buy, parties to attend, and special programs at church in which to participate. Many young people have projects and exams to contend with before the winter break from school begins. In addition, young people pick up on the extra stresses on their parents and caregivers that come with the season. Amid the busy-ness of December, John the baptizer calls youth to examine their lives, values, and priorities as they prepare to celebrate Christ's birth. This self-examination leads to seeking God's forgiveness and preparing the way of the Lord.

*Holy God, help me to examine my own values and priorities as I prepare for the coming of your Son. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- blue or purple cloth or placemat
- Advent wreath, 4 blue or purple candles
- battery-powered votive or tea light candles
- sticky notes
- pens
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Bibles

For Responding:

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens, recycling bin
- option 2: newspapers, scissors, glue sticks, newsprint
- option 3: poster board, markers

For Video Connection:

- Internet-connected device

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, place four purple or blue candles in the holders of an Advent wreath. Place it on a blue or purple cloth or placemat. Use the color that your church uses in worship during Advent. If you do not have an Advent wreath, place the candles in holders in the center of an artificial evergreen wreath or simply arrange them on the cloth.

Give participants sticky notes and a pen. On separate sticky notes, have participants write all of the things they are doing and still have to do in order to prepare for the Christmas holiday. Have participants place the notes on a wall. When all are finished, review the various notes together. Then, have participants collaborate to group together notes that are similar. Ask: How do the activities on the posted notes prepare the way for Christ's birth?

Explain that, in today's Scripture passage, John the baptizer offers a challenge for Christ's followers during the season of Advent.

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath. Have a participant light two candles and pray:

*God of love, thank you for your presence among us as we continue our Advent journey together and as we seek to connect with your holy Word. Amen.*

## EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Isaiah and Luke). Have participants open their Bibles to the book of Isaiah and review together the information on the resource sheet about it. Then, have participants find the Gospel of Luke in their Bibles and review together the information on the resource sheet about it.

Read together Luke 3:1–2. Ask:

- ✠ How does John compare to the important leaders who are listed in these verses?
- ✠ Why is this difference significant?

Have participants mark Luke 3 with the resource sheet and then turn to Isaiah 40. Read together Isaiah 40:1–5. Ask: How might Isaiah’s words be comforting to the Hebrew people as they waited and hoped to return to Jerusalem after being exiled?

Then, read together Luke 3:3–6. Explain that the hearers of Luke’s Gospel were also going through a tough time because they were living under the oppression of the Roman leaders. Ask:

- ✠ How might John’s words resonate with people who were being oppressed?
- ✠ What is meant by challenging hearers to straighten paths, fill valleys, level mountains, and smooth the rough places?
- ✠ What does it mean to seek a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”?

Explain that *repentance* means “turning from sin.” Form groups of two or three. Have groups create and present skits that depict scenes where someone is repenting. When all of the skits have been presented, discuss:

- ✠ How does repentance lead to God’s forgiveness?
- ✠ How does repentance prepare the way of the Lord?

Explain that John’s message called people to prepare for Christ’s coming by “clearing the way” in order to receive Jesus. John’s challenge for us today is to repent and prepare.

## RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. Seeking Forgiveness** Participants will seek forgiveness from God as they prepare the way of the Lord. Give each person a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Personal Reflection) and a pen. Have participants silently follow the instructions on the page to reflect upon the ways in which they have fallen short of living the life that God expects of them and write a prayer. Tell participants that no one else will see what they are writing. When all are finished, gather the group around the recycling bin. As a symbol of repentance, have group members tear up their papers and place the shreds in the recycling bin. Discuss:
  - ✠ How does it feel to repent of your sins as you look forward to the coming of the Christ child?
  - ✠ What else can you do to prepare the way of the Lord?

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- 2. Forgiveness Collage** Participants will create a collage that portrays the need for God's forgiveness. Make newspapers, scissors, and glue sticks available. On a sheet of newsprint, have participants make a collage of words and images that show how our society is in need of forgiveness. When finished, review the words and images and pray together a prayer that seeks God's forgiveness.
- 3. Advent Mission Project** The participants continue to plan and lead a giving tree project for your congregation. As a group, check to see that the sign is in place. Be sure it tells people where the collected items will be given. Take care of any additional announcements needed in the worship bulletin or on the church website. Have the participants sign up for times in which it would be helpful to have someone present as church members bring in donations.

## CLOSING

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath. Give each person a battery-powered votive or tea light candle. Have each participant name one way in which he or she can help prepare the way of the Lord. After the situation is named, have participants light their candles and place them around the Advent wreath.

Close with this blessing:

*Go into God's world and find ways to prepare the way of the Lord in all that you do and in all that you say. Amen.*

Extinguish all candles. Save them to use next session.

## ■ ENHANCEMENT

### VIDEO CONNECTION

Watch together a YouTube video of "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord" from the musical *Godspell*. (A suitable video can be found by searching YouTube for "Prepare Ye Godspell.")

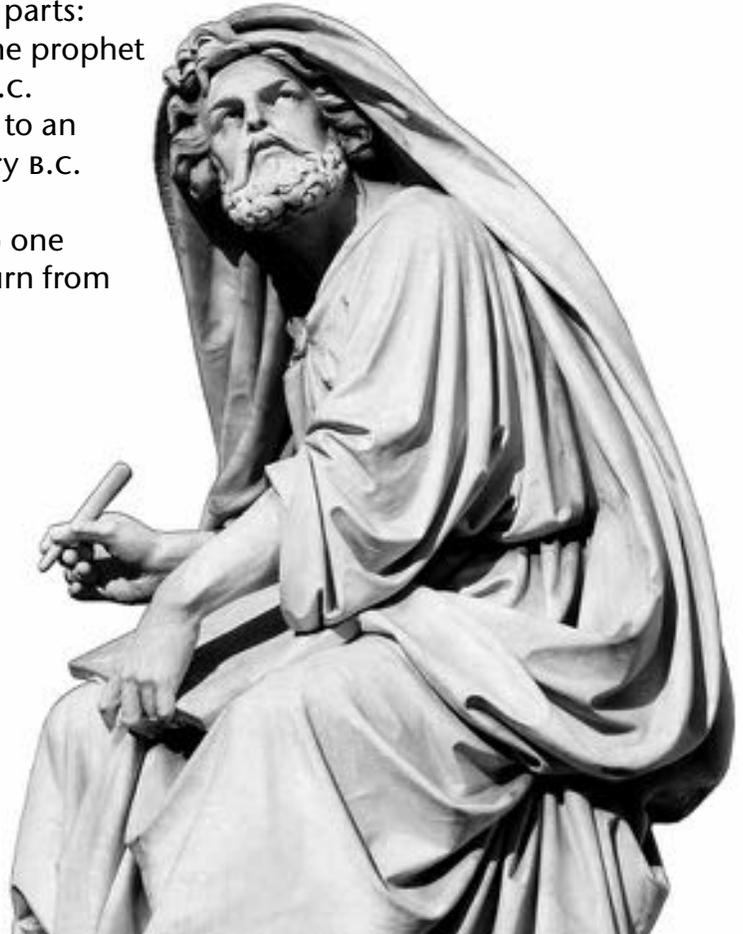
After watching the video, discuss:

- ✂ How did this video portray John the baptizer?
- ✂ What did the characters in the video do to prepare the way of the Lord?
- ✂ How does this video connect with Luke 3:1–6?

## Isaiah and Luke

### The Book of Isaiah

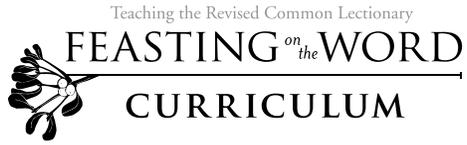
- Isaiah is the first and longest book of the Hebrew prophets.
- A prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God to God's people.
- The book is a collection of prophetic voices who prophesied at different times throughout Israel's history.
- Scholars consider this book to be in three parts:
  - First Isaiah (chs. 1–39) is attributed to the prophet Isaiah who lived in the eighth century B.C.
  - Second Isaiah (chs. 40–55) is attributed to an unknown prophet from the sixth century B.C. who lived in Babylon during the exile.
  - Third Isaiah (chs. 56–66) is attributed to one or more prophets in Judah after the return from the exile.



### Gospel According to Luke

- Luke is a synoptic Gospel, which means it tells the story of Jesus' life and ministry.
- Little is known about the author of this Gospel. However, the writer is understood to have been a physician who also wrote the Acts of the Apostles.
- Little is known about the date in which the Gospel was written, but we do know that it was written after Mark's Gospel.
- This Gospel emphasizes Jesus' role as a compassionate friend to those on the margins and as one who was sent to save the lost.
- According to Luke 1:2, the writer of Luke was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry.

**December 9, 2018**  
**Preparing the Way**



**Youth**  
**Resource Sheet 2**

## Personal Reflection

How have you fallen short of living the life that God expects of you?

Write a short prayer that asks for God's forgiveness.

