

Sermon for December 6, 2009
 Advent II
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I. Now reading the Gospel of Luke

- A. Began last week the year of Luke
- B. The sweetest of the Gospel; the most tender stories.
- C. The nativity; Jesus' childhood.
- D. The unique parable of the Prodigal son.
- E. A gospel about merciful living; Magnificat; Lazarus the Leper; The Man God called a fool.
- F. A gospel to underscore the mercy and gentleness of Christ; and the mercy demanded of us.

II. Luke's Pretensions as a Historian

A. His introduction: *Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you.*

B. Your preacher of course, thinks of himself as something of a historian as well.

C. Objectivity was one of the pretenses of history in the modern period. Hints of that in Luke's ancient introduction. History is to tell about past events as they happened; No spin.

D. But objectivity is awfully difficult to achieve. All history has its creator's slant.

III. Luke's history is a theological history; both Greek and Hebrew.

A. It is a history of how God worked in Jesus of Nazareth. History with a God slant. We can approve.

B. So this beginning. *In 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, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.*

C. Luke emulating Greek and Roman histories that dated things by the reign of political leaders. A little showy; Luke wants us to know that he know how to write it up correctly; as his cultural superiors would have.

D. But not just showy; also a theological point. God works in history. You can date it; our truth claims will stand up to verification. We are not making this up!

E. But the real import of the sentence when he trades his Greco-Roman historical convention for the Hebrew prophetic tradition: ***the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.*** In the Greek: *egento rema theou epi John...en te eremo.* The strong clause in the sentence.

F. Showing us John as a prophet in Israel's great prophetic tradition, an heir to Isaiah, Amos, Ezekiel, a teller of God's truth, a harbinger of God's in-breaking power.

G. That is John's power; that the word of Israel's God reached him.

IV. The Power is in the Word of God, at work in the Creation

A. The other guys in the sentence had the titles: *Emperor, governor, ruler, high-priest.*

B. John simply the son of Zechariah, a small town priest.

C. And him in the wilderness. Not in Rome or Tiberius, not in Athens or Alexandria. In the wilderness.

D. The seven leaders named were all dead by the time of Luke's writing. Two had been active in the executions first of John and then of Jesus.

F. Luke's first readers knew this sentence placed John in august but fallen company; though murdered, her was the one left standing; he became the hinge of salvation history.

G. Greco-Roman historical convention meant to suggest that the context for understanding these events was the rule of various political leaders.

H. But no, Luke's real point, that because the Word of God came, the

context for everything is God's mercy in Jesus.

V. On whom does history turn?

A. Political and cultural elites? No. Luke cites them, but clearly moves on.

B. Salvation history turns on the faithful whom God raises up.

C. Those like John. Last of the prophets; first of the disciples.

D. Could mean that we are missing out; with our college degrees and good taste and relatively privileged position.

E. Could be that the Word of God is coming to bear in Africa, rather than the first world.

F. Or perhaps in Greenwood, rather than Boston, New York, London, and Paris. You know the press we get when a national reporter comes to town. How sorry they feel for us.

VI. But the great thing: The Word of God comes, eventually to all.

A. Finally, the good-news, the great promise of John's preaching is in the section of Isaiah repeated for us:

*Every 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;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

B. All of us: even nasty Herod, Pontius Pilate, even comfy middle-class first world cultural Christians.

C. We shall all see the salvation of God. But will we recognize the salvation of God when it comes? John did; let it be our prayer.

VII. Luke's "orderly account" will be before for 12 months.

A. May it help us to see that the context for our lives is not the presidency

of Barack Obama; not the governorship of Mark Sanford, not even the mayoralty of Welborn Adams.

B. The context that matters most is the Word of God at work among us.