

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

3:1-12

Thursday Morning Bible Study  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Wauwatosa, WI

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3:1a – John begins preaching (See Luke 3:1-2)

- 30+ years have passed. Tiberius Caesar become the new emperor.
- Herod's will gave his kingdom to his three sons: Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip. Caesar approves, but does not give any of them the title of "King."
- Archelaus is called "Ethnarch" of Judea, Samaria and Idumea.
- Antipas – Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.
- Philip, Tetrarch of Tracoinitis (Northeastern territories)

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3:1a – John begins preaching (See Luke 3:1-2)

- The Jewish leaders were Annas and Caiaphas.
- A high priest had to be a Levite and a descendant of Aaron. These two were neither.
- Under Rome’s control, the office went to the highest bidder.
- Annas was appointed by Rome for about 10 years.
- Then Joseph Caiaphas, his son-in-law was appointed. Held office for 18 years.
- They created the party of the Sadducees.

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3:1a – John begins preaching (See Luke 3:1-2)

- The Sadducees held most seats on the Sanhedrin, but not all. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were exception.
- The Sadducees only accepted the Torah as scripture.
- They rejected life after death, the concept of an immortal soul, and the resurrection.
- They held no love for the Pharisees.
- They were corrupt and were allegiant to Rome.
- Annas’ family held the priesthood for 60 years.

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3:1a – John begins preaching (See Luke 3:1-2)

- Because of the corruption in the priesthood, the Essenes formed their own community in the wilderness.
- They lived in Qumran, near the Dead Sea – produced the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- Based their existence on Is. 40:3




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3:1-2 – John in the Wilderness

- Like the prophet Elijah who had to flee from Jezebel, so John goes out to the wilderness, possibly to escape the corruption in Israel.
- He serves in the role of prophet-priest, like Aaron, Samuel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah.
- John’s father was a priest, and thus John should have been a priest serving at the temple.
- But he cannot do that. He goes into the wilderness.

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3:1-2 – John in the Wilderness

- The “wilderness” is an important term in the Bible. It means desert, but more than that. It is a place you go to encounter God.
- It is a place where you will survive only by the grace of God.
- In Hebrew, “wilderness” means literally “from the word.” It is a place where he will get nothing except God.
- The wilderness was a time for Israel to learn to trust in God and rely on Him and Him alone.

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3:1-2 – John in the Wilderness

- John should have begun his service as a priest around age 30. But that’s when he goes into the wilderness.
- Was John an Essene? He certainly had contact with them. Both John and the Essenes separated from the temple priesthood. The both looked for the coming messianic era. The practiced baptism and proclaimed repentance.
- When Jesus told the disciples to prepare the Passover, they were to follow a man carrying a jar of water. (Luke 22:10) Only an Essene would be doing this.

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3:3 – “A Voice of one calling in the wilderness”

- Is. 40:3 – Isaiah has the picture that for the coming King, the road must be repaired and straightened.
- But there is a deeper spiritual meaning: In order for the Messiah to come, there must be improvements. John is the “road crew” preparing us for the coming Messiah.
- John prepares the future for the followers of Jesus. At least 4 of his disciples became disciples of Jesus.

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3:3 – “A Voice of one calling in the wilderness”

- The first step in making this road ready is for ego to be made low. The first step in following Christ is to repent.
- The Kingdom of Heaven does not turn everything upside down, it is our sin that turns things upside down. Thus the kingdom of heaven is God turning things right-side up.
- In repentance we reclaim the true self that was created in the image of God.

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3:3 – “A Voice of one calling in the wilderness”

- The sinful self is alien to god. That’s not how we have been created. The kingdom of heaven is the work of God in restoring paradise.
- “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This is the gospel message of the prophets and of John and Jesus.
- To repent is to return to God with a desire to be committed to follow His Word. It’s a 180 degree turn.
- John’s message means that the Messianic era has begun.

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### 3:4-6 – John’s appearance

- John is more than just an oddball. His clothing means something.
- Luke 7:31 – John ate no bread and drank no wine. He was a Nazarite from birth.
- John is recreating Israel’s experience in the wilderness. He lives strictly on what he can gather from the wild.
- His clothing was camel’s hair, just like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8)

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### 3:4-6 – John’s Food

- Not grasshoppers. “Locusts” refers to the pods of carob trees.
- He also eats honey – not bee honey, but date honey. It’s the syrup of figs and dates.
- Thus he eats what God provides in the wilderness.




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