

December 28, 2025

The Other Christmas Baby

Can't We Just be OK?

Luke 3:1-20

The new year is around the corner and a time for new beginnings. New years resolutions . . . But there is more of a trend today to not make new years resolutions, because for many it doesn't last. Starting January 1, some people will go on a diet, but by January 3 it is broken, because food was served to them then they'll start it the next day. Or many people start going to the gym. Much of January the gym is full, but by February it's much less full even when people purchase a one-year membership. Changes, goals, new decisions for self-improvement, many people don't bother anymore because they know they will fail.

Guilt-driven thinking is no longer popular. There is a positive growing trend today for people to say it's okay . . . I'm not perfect. It's okay, I'm unable to do that. It's okay that is too high an expectation for me.

Like, the model on a magazine or in the Instagram ad, we think, I will never look like that. Some advertisements now tend to show more realistic models. At times not too skinny and blemished.

Like, the sports star, who has made it to the top with talent and such hard work, we think, I won't be like that. I'm not going to even try. I just play for fun.

Like, the musician who sings like that . . . they are good, but again, we think, I will never be that good – I just sing for fun.

Often people are so much better these days with saying . . . it's okay that I'm not like that. I won't measure up . . . I'm not even going to try.

I'm glad the trend in society is to move away from this perfectionism and we're not concerned about being on the top all the time.

But don't misunderstand me . . . I don't think it is wrong to say . . . I'm above average in this subject or activity. I'd rather have a doctor who got straight A's doing my surgery than the one who barely passed.

I'd rather have a pilot who was top of his class flying my airplane than the one who just got by.

I'd rather have a plumber who excelled in their apprenticeship than one who does it by trial and error.

There is a time for excellence too.

It is good to say that God created me the way I am and I'm OK. I'm happy the way I have learned to appreciate myself.

But are we? Are you content in life to say that about everything? . . . I'm OK. When comparing yourself to someone who is so much more gifted and superior to you . . . I think it is good to say . . . I'm Ok. Or if we compare ourselves to a criminal . . . and we can say I'm ok. I think many people park there in life.

Other people say . . . I'm living the Canadian dream. I have a job and family and we're getting by . . . not rich but getting by. Isn't that good enough? **Can't we just be, ok?**

Just like many people today feel they are Ok, 2000 years ago, just before Christ came on the scene, many people felt they were good too. Sure, there were struggles in the world, but many were quite comfortable in their lives, living the dream. People who had rights and privilege, people who knew God - they thought they were okay until they met **the other Christmas Baby**.

The past few weeks we've been looking at the first couple of chapters of Luke and the different Songs of Christmas. Today I want us to pick up in chapter 3 of Luke and look at the other Christmas baby. You probably don't think about him that way . . . but in the Christmas story there is another Christmas baby mentioned. Jesus' older cousin, John the Baptist. The miraculous son to Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were too old to have children, but God gave them a miracle . . . and it was a miracle story surrounding his birth.

John's message was a message that many people heard in his day. We need to hear and apply his message today. As we leave Christmas and move into the new year . . . it is good to reflect on the message of John.

And so, this morning, we need to grasp the important message that John the Baptist preached.

If you are able, will you stand with me as we read God's word in Luke 3.

As the story of John unfolds, Luke gives us some background.

He starts off with the great world leaders of the day and the local leaders and then to John.

John has a place in history. He made a great mark on world history, greater than these other world leaders.

He lived in the desert around the Jordan river. Not a lot of things are in the desert. Some of you might go to the desert this winter - many people go and live there; it's a nice climate in the winter that's if you have water and air-conditioning.

In those days people hardly went into the desert. Biblically speaking, some people in the past went to the desert to meet with God. Moses did, the children of Israel did. Elijah fled to the wilderness.

That is where John was. The Spirit of God was stirring and drew people out to go and see John. People wanted to go on this religious retreat - and they went to see John preach and baptize people. The

interesting thing, John baptized people roughly in the same spot where Elijah was taken away by the Chariot of fire on the East side of the Jordan. People said John was like Elijah. There were many common things about the two of them.

The first thing we can see about important message that John the Baptist preached.

1. He was the answer to the ancient prophecy. V 4-6

There was something about him that drew people and caused people to follow him. He had disciples. He started preaching around the Jordan area and people started to follow him

Thousands would flock out to see him. Maybe word spread that here was a man who spoke the word of the Lord like the great Prophet Elijah. He was the talk of the Nation. He dressed strange. Matthew said John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. (**Change**) His food was locusts and wild honey. A simple, inexpensive wardrobe – camel's hair. . . not the softer wool wardrobe that most people would use. His diet was very simple – locust – grasshoppers and wild honey. Honey that was found in the wild. Ever been around a wild honey nest . . . to take some of that honey you probably would be stung. He was a different, a simple man with a strong message.

Going to see John would have been a phenomenon in terms of the draw from an event like Woodstock in 1969. I wasn't born then, but that event is a world-renowned historical Event.

100's of **Thousands of people flocked to the middle-of-nowhere Woodstock New York**, out in a field to hear some musicians play. It is the monumental rock and roll event of all time – no other concert event compares to that weekend. 400,000 people showed up. Even to this day people know it as a pivotal event in music history and the Hippy movement. I'm not endorsing what that event was about . . . I'm just saying it was a monumental event.

In comparison to what John the Baptist did, it was similar - people went into the middle of nowhere to hear John. Thousands flocked to see him from all over the known world.

He was known as a great prophet, just like the prophets of the Old Testament.

His message was a fulfillment of Isaiah to prepare people. Make the wild ups and downs and crookedness of sin level and straight for the preparation of the Messiah.

So, they went to see his show.

But his message was not the message that would win and influence people. He wasn't your feel-good type of guy.

2. His words were a wake-up call. V 7-10.

God's Spirit as upon him and he had a message. A strong message. People were pulled to go see him.

Verve 7 - You brood of Vipers.

Anyone here been called a Viper? This phrase is not one that we typically use. When I think of a Viper, I think of the cool car that Dodge made that was really fast.

Not what John had in mind. This is not a term of endearment.

This is unsettling. Vipers are poisonous snakes that no one wants to see. A group of poisonous slithering snakes that would strike and bite a lethal bite.

Some would use fire to drive them out from the rock. No one wanted to be around vipers. The wrath of Fire would draw them out and then they would be eliminated from where they couldn't do any more harm.

You could imagine these crowds of people coming . . . you brood of Vipers!

You're a bunch of evil slithering snakes. Ouch! Strong, difficult words.

You know the wrath of God will be coming. And it is coming for you. God cannot look at sin. . . sin brings God's wrath. A holy righteous God can't look at sin.

V8 Produce fruit in keeping with Repentance.

John's message was all about repentance. Turn from sin and turn to God.

His message was to get people to see it is not just a belief - it is a life-change. Live what you believe.

In verse 8b - Abraham as their father. The Jewish person said, I'm the child of the Father of the Jews. My history, my genetics, my family is the thing that matters.

God wants to use his children - but many of them didn't truly live what they believed. They didn't keep the covenant.

He said . . . God could raise up new people from the rocks. Don't think you're some special person because of who your parents are. Because you were born into a family that called themselves Christian does not make you a Christian.

For instance, if both your parents are people who drive cars and you are born into that family, it doesn't mean you are allowed to drive a car. You must go through the process of having that privilege.

Being called a Christian does not make you a Christian. Each of us need to come to the realization that we are like one of those vipers . . . we have a sin problem, a shame issue . . . that we can't get rid of on our own. We must acknowledge that and turn away from that sin and turn to the one who can only take it away.

There are too many people who think they're okay. We play that comparison game . . . I'm better than that person. I'm better than most people.

Tim Shuttle in his book "Shrink" he tells this story

Researcher Dan Ariely did a massive study to try and understand why some people lie, cheat, and steal. Ariely and his team went to college campuses and offered to pay students for every math puzzle they could solve in five minutes. At the end of the five minutes, the students were asked to grade their own papers and shred them in the back of the room. Then the students stood in line and received money for every right answer. But the students didn't know that the shredder didn't actually shred their papers so the researchers could check to see if they were telling the truth. Ariely found that, on average, students reported solving six problems, when in fact they solved only four. Over the course of their research, after testing 30,000 people, Ariely found only 12 "big cheaters," compared to 18,000 "small cheaters." The big cheaters stole a total of \$150, while the small cheaters stole around \$36,000—just one or two dollars at a time. Ariely did this research project all over the world—in the United States, Western Europe, Turkey, Israel, China, and many other countries—and the results were always roughly the same.

Ariely concluded that most dishonesty happens among ordinary people who think of themselves as basically honest. But when added together, all this "little" dishonesty has a huge impact. Most of the problems faced by the human race are not rooted in the lives of outliers and psychopaths—life's big cheaters. Our problems are rooted in the lives of typical, ordinary people who find ways to rationalize their own bad behavior. In other words, we want to think of ourselves as honest people while enjoying the benefits of dishonesty.

Adapted from Tim Suttle, Shrink (Zondervan, 2014), pp. 114-115

John gets to the heart of the matter – we're prone to wander from the things of God . . . we're a bunch of vipers looking out for our own interest too often and we think we're okay.

We're clearly not, on our own.

He goes on...

Verses 8-9 - the non-fruit producing trees will be chopped down into the fire. Or the trees that produce bad fruit need to be chopped. You might look like a healthy tree with branches and leaves but are you bearing good fruit?

You might have a tag that says - I'm an apple tree. But there is no fruit, it is a worthless tree only good for the fire.

I'm a Christian - but no fruit – a believer needs to be bearing fruit.

John gets at the heart of the matter . . . we're not OK. Sure, on the surface we are okay. But we've got a big problem . . . the curse of sin that brings death. John is the doctor diagnosing the problem. If you keep on this diet, you will die soon. Change your ways.

Have you dealt with that curse of sin?

There is a disturbing growing trend to ignore death. People don't talk about it. I've heard of families who have no service, no burial, nothing for their loved one. Let's move on and pretend the person almost never existed. The more secular way of dealing with death is that people celebrate life . . . and let's not talk about that D word. It's rarely talked about or faced.

Many people are so busy with life that they think they will never die. They don't make time to consider eternity. It's almost a taboo in our society to think about the end of life . . . death.

We all have a problem . . . we're cursed - cursed with sin that brings death. Physical death and eternal death. John gets us thinking.

Have you dealt with that sin problem?

Some people say yes . . . it's because I was born into a Christian family. My mom and dad took me to church and told me about the Bible.

Sorry, that's not good enough.

Some people say yes . . . it's because I'm good. My good outweighs my bad.

Sorry, that's not good enough

We are never good enough. We all fall short at one time or the other.

Some people say yes . . . I said a prayer and I believe. James said, the demons believe that too.

John says . . . turn from your ways and have a heart and life towards God. **It starts with a heart change and then action.**

3. He called people to repentance and a life-change that was sacrificial. V 10-14

- If you have two shirts and see someone who needs one - give it to them.
- Tax collectors - these are the hated sinners - hated by the Jewish people. John didn't say quit your job - he said collect only what you are to collect.
- Soldiers – also hated by the Jewish people. They were like the police of the day. He said don't be corrupt and make accusations to get money from people. Do your job and don't be lazy. Find out who is truly guilty and not accuse the person you think. Don't arrest someone just because they are near the crime scene and charge them do proper investigations.

John hits all three of these people where it hurts. He hits them in the wallet. He talks about how some of them make their money. Are you honest and honourable as you make money. Are you trusting God first or are you taking things into your own hands? Are you using your money to honour God?

If you want to see where someone's priorities lie, it starts with their bank account. John hits that hard.

Let's not forget the main message . . . it's not about doing good things. It is first about repentance . . . and then living righteously.

This Christmas season many people have given out things to people in need. We've all been asked by many to give to the needs of others. And many people do. You and I know some very nice honest people who give generously. There are many people around us, fellow students, fellow employees, neighbours, family members people around us who are so kind, nice and generous. But they all have a problem . . . the heart of the problem is sin, and they have no way to deal with it.

John's message is . . .

We're not Ok - we have a sin problem . . . we need to repent, turn to God and live what we believe.

The story goes on.

The multitudes were cut to heart . . . and people turned to God and were baptized by John and his disciples.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. It was preparing people for the messiah. I'm being baptized symbolizing washing away my sins.

The multitudes asked each other . . . is this the Christ. Christ is not the last name for Jesus it was his title. It's not mister Christ and his first name is Jesus. People call me Pastor John . . . pastor is my title, what I do. I wasn't born with that title.

Christ means the Messiah, the Anointed one. They wondered if John was that Christ – he said he was not.

15-18

John said . . . I'm not worthy to even be the slave of the one coming ahead of me to untie His sandals.

4. John was not the answer, but he pointed to the only one who provides the power to transform - Jesus Christ. V15-20

He was not the Messiah - but this great figure was preparing people for Christ.

It's interesting at this time John's ministry didn't have the complete answer - it wasn't the end. He was the beginning. People had to start with repentance and believe in God and then go perform sacrifices at the temple to deal with their sins.

John said someone else was coming.

Jesus Christ - who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. And with fire. The power of God - a refining fire.

Someone who is so much greater . . . someone who will be the sacrifice once and for all for your sins. No longer will people need to go to the temple and shed the blood of a perfect animal to pay for a sacrifice.

Someone so much greater . . . He is the only one who conquered death and gives eternal life.

Someone so much greater who gives us the only way to our Heavenly Father. There was no other way.

Someone who is so much greater. As we turn from our ways and surrender to Christ, He gives us the Spirit to help us turn from sin and live a life of righteousness.

You and I can't live a righteous life on our own . . . You can't do it on your own. The Spirit's power helps us to live a righteous life. We turn to Christ and seek the Spirit's power to live a life of righteousness.

John was so truthful when he said what he said. . . Someone so much greater is coming.

Jesus:

- He was the payment needed to get us into a right relationship with God.
- He died on the Cross to deal with the sin problem once and for all. We don't just need to turn from our sins . . . we need to turn to Jesus and allow him to produce fruit in our lives.
- Have you done that? You need to do it today. Each and everyone of us need Christ to live life to the full here on earth and to have eternal life.

John ends up baptizing Jesus in verse 21 . . . Jesus is the fulfillment of John's ministry. John baptized people because they repented. Jesus was the one who will take away the sins of those who repent. Jesus had no reason to repent. After Jesus was baptized . . . John, with his tough message told the ruler Herod that his adulterous relationship was wrong – sex out of marriage is sin. He needed to repent. Herod didn't want to respond to the truth and John lost his life . . . in fact, his head, for speaking the truth of the word of God.

Jesus said this about John in **Luke 7:28 I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John** . . . Jesus said one of the greatest people ever born was John . . . what made him so great? He prepared people for Jesus.

As we come into a new year, I think we all need to aim for greatness. Not being average, but greatness. Like John the Baptist, we need to see people in our sphere of influence as who they truly are

... people in need of a Saviour. We're not okay, we should not be content with how things are. It's a dying world in need of a Saviour and we need to share His love with others around us this year.

John's message was a tough one to take. This other Christmas Baby had a strong message. We are sinners, we are heading for eternal death if we don't let Christ deal with our sin problem. We're not OK, unless Christ is Lord of our lives.

Let me give you a practical application as we apply this to our lives. . . John's message was for a certain time and context. John was speaking to those who were seeking God. John didn't go randomly on the street and start preaching . . . people came to hear his message.

Sometimes good intentioned believers feel it is their job to preach John's message to people who don't want to hear and it comes across as judgemental and self-righteous. I've met too many people disillusioned by self-righteous believers trying to put people in their place. There is a time for a prophet and a time for a gentle shepherd. Let's be careful to know when we should sound like a prophet.

May we respond to John's message as we embark on a new year.

With your head bowed . . . maybe this message has brought to your attention that you haven't dealt with your sin and shame problem. We have people at the front here to pray for you and explain how to receive Christ as your Saviour.

Maybe there is a sin in your life that is holding you back and you keep returning to it. You need to confess that and have someone pray for you. You need to seek Christ's power in your life. We have people at the front willing to pray for you for that.

Maybe, as you reflect on your life you are not producing fruit; fruit that will last. You need to walk in obedience and surrender to Christ and live a life that produces His fruit.

2 Cor 5:17 - 20