

**Reflection on the Gospel-2nd Sunday of Advent Year C
(Luke 3:1-6)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Pope Francis has called us to look into our hearts, to let go of all that is harsh or cruel and to bring the compassion and mercy of God to our troubled planetary home. At the International Conference marking the third anniversary of *Laudato Si'* (July 2018), he thanked the participants for coming together to hear “with their hearts the increasingly desperate cries of the earth and its poor.” The Conference title, “Saving our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth” underscores the urgency of the call. Our courageous pope is giving extraordinary leadership to the global community.

Like Luke, author of the third gospel, Pope Francis recognises that this message is for the whole world and not simply for the Church community. Luke situates his gospel drama on a national and international stage and in relation to global events. He wants to insist that religion is no private affair and that the story of the movement around Jesus of Nazareth is no ordinary, everyday story. It is rather a story with momentous political and religious significance. Luke is strong on dramatic impact and less concerned about the facts. He situates events in the “pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas”, implying that there were two high priests at the same time. In fact, Caiaphas succeeded his father-in-law Annas as high priest, even if the influence of the latter persisted into Caiaphas’ pontificate.

Luke presents John the son of Zechariah as a prophet in the long line of prophets that culminates in the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth on the global stage. Jesus is the one who truly brings the salvation of our God. It is worth noting that prophecy in Luke is not reserved to the male characters. With the shift from private to public space in Luke 3, however, women prophets who featured prominently in the earlier chapters (Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna) now disappear from the narrative.

Luke 3:1-6 contains some of Luke’s favourite themes: prophecy and its fulfilment; the word of God; reversal of expectations; conversion or repentance; proclaiming the good news; forgiveness of sins; salvation. As in Israel’s past, the wilderness or desert is the locus of God’s revelation. The prophet John calls on the people of the region around the Jordan River to turn their hearts and their lives around, to accept “a baptism of *metanoia* or conversion for the forgiveness of sins’.

We might listen to the Isaiah citation that follows (“Prepare the way...”) against the backdrop of the first reading from the prophet Baruch. God’s way involves putting on the “cloak of integrity” or “robe of righteousness” and allowing God to provide an escort of mercy/works of mercy (*eleēmosunē*) and integrity/right relationship (*dikaiosunē*). If we take seriously the call to live the gospel, we shall surely search for ways to heal the broken relationships within our ailing planet.