

Isaiah 40 (NRSV)

1 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.
3 A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Luke 3 (NRSV)

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. . . 2 . . . the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. 6 And all people will see God's salvation.'" 7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." 10 "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. 11 John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." 12 Even tax collectors came to be baptised. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" 13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay." 15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, "I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you

with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. 19 But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, 20 Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

A voice cries out in the wilderness:

- **Proclaiming a baptism of _____ AND _____.**
- **Preparing the _____ for the Lord.**
- **Portraying the situation as it _____.**
- **Pointing to Jesus and the _____ news of the coming Kingdom of God.**
- **If it ain't _____, it ain't the gospel.**
