

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The second week of Advent introduces the figure of John the Baptist to the scene. I think we all find St. John rather fascinating... after all, how many people think it's a good idea to go out into the desert, wearing itchy camel's hair and eating bugs? Yet, this odd figure drew many people to himself, while always pointing to one greater than himself.

It is interesting to note how St. Luke introduces the Baptist. We will hear something similar when we get to Christmas... a very specific setting. Today we hear:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.
(Luke 3:1-2)

There are many times that the world tells us that the Bible is a "fairytale." But how do fairytales start? Usually, "Once upon a time, in a far away land..." or "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." The Greek and Roman myths are all set somewhere else, in a time that is indeterminate. St. Luke does NOT write mythology or fairytales. Luke is starting out to write *history*. Look carefully at this: he tells a specific time, referring to specific, historic personages – Tiberius Caesar's 15 year of reign, Pilate, Herod, and others. There are specific places, too: Galilee, Judea, Abilene. John's appearance is not "once upon a time," it is in time and space. *This is history.*

It is interesting that the culture today wants us to believe that everything in the Bible is merely fiction. Proponents of this view try to get us to doubt that Jesus actually existed, saying that the authors of the Gospels were writing mythology. The truth is that when you compare the Gospels to their contemporary literature, they look nothing like mythologies and everything like biographies. Dr. Brant Pitre, in his book *The Case for Jesus*, fights this view. He shows, looking at ancient texts and historical criticism – using both internal and external evidence – that the authors of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) set out to write history not mythology. (Incidentally, we are giving out *The Case for Jesus* for Christmas this year... and you can get a sneak peak, since we have the books out this weekend.)

Why is this so important? Why does this matter? Well, if the Gospel is fiction, then our faith is a fraud. The truth of our faith is based on real life events that truly happened – God became man on one particular day in time, in a particular nation and people, in a particular woman; this God-man was killed by a specific government, in a real city; that He really rose from the dead in fulfilment of the Scriptures, and there were people who saw Him alive and well after His death, and who were alive and witnessing at the time the Gospels were written. If none of this really happened, then our faith is a lie. If this is not just "truth," but also "fact" (if we can make the distinction Indiana Jones made), then we can know for certain that God came into our midst to show us how much He loves us.

As we continue in this Advent season, let us prepare the way of the Lord in our hearts, by refocusing on the truths of our Faith – God's passionate, intimate love for us, calling us to union with Himself – and let's let that truth shape and reshape our hearts, our families, our world.