

# JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

THE LIFE OF CHRIST WITH SAINT LUKE



“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS...”

Read Luke 3:1-20

We refer to **Saint John** as both **the Forerunner** and **the Baptist** because he both *prepared the way of the Lord* and *preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*.

John's work was preparatory in nature. He did not preach in order to acquire disciples for himself, but rather to prepare everyone for the coming of the

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## GOALS

What is repentance?  
What is threshing & winnowing in relation to the parables?

2

## AT CHURCH

Sacrament of Confession

3

## AT HOME

How do we prepare for Confession?  
Asking for forgiveness from one another



### Threshing:

The process of removing the grain (wheat) from the straw



### Winnowing:

Using wind or a special basket to separate the grain (wheat) from the chaff (inedible hull)



### Repentance:

a change of heart with great effort to return to God

~  
Confession

Messiah, Jesus Christ. Christ was about to begin His ministry, therefore, John was forthcoming with the urgency for everyone to repent.

He “baptized with water, outwardly marking men as repentant; the stronger One would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire, transforming men from within with the cleansing fire of the Spirit of God.” (Farley, pg 86) Fire both illumines and burns. The Holy Spirit illumines the righteous and burns sinners. With those whom the Holy Spirit illumines, the Holy Spirit does so according to each (righteous) person’s disposition. As we read about the lives of the saints, we learn about the different ways in which the Holy Spirit has illumined them and the gifts bestowed upon them.

## THE AX & THE TREE

Notice the ax leaning against the tree in the icon of Theophany - “And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Luke 3:9)

We are called to bear good fruit as we strive for a righteous life devoted to God. Those who do not bear good fruit (sinners) are cut down.

What does it mean to “bear good fruit?”



We will not be saved simply because we were baptized as Orthodox Christians, go to church regularly, or show up to Sunday School.

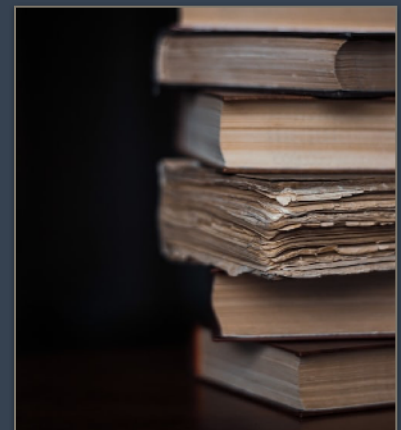
## EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Gospel of Luke: Good News for the Poor by Fr. Lawrence Farley, pages 79 - 94

The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Luke by Blessed Theophylact, pages 40 - 46

[Search the Scriptures Live Podcast: “Brood of Vipers”](#)  
by Dr. Jeannie Constantinou

[Separating the Wheat from the Chaff](#)



We have to *live* our faith *daily*. As we strive to pursue virtue, we will be tempted, and we will fall. When we sin, we should run to Confession! Repentance is the recognition that I have turned away from God through my thoughts, words, or deeds and have a deep desire to return to God. After we go to Confession, it is as though our sins never happened. God is merciful and loving and He longs for us to return to Him.

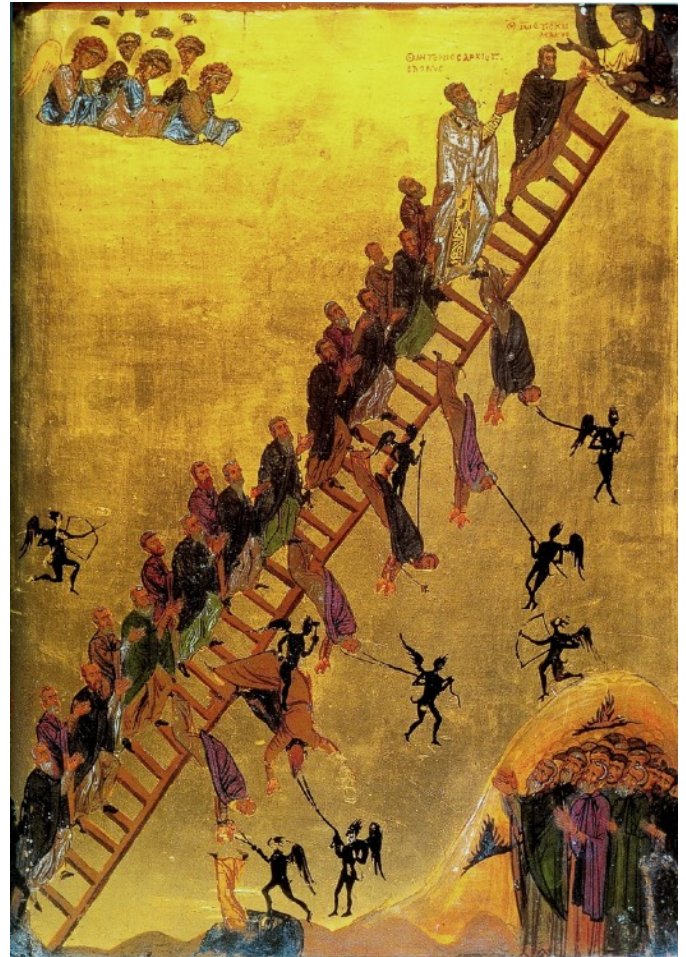
## JOHN URGED REPENTANCE

The word “sin” means “missing the mark.” When we are aiming at something specific, we are aiming at a goal. What is our goal as Orthodox Christians? Our goal is theosis, which is union with God.

Think about the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent. Each of us are striving to reach the top of the ladder and be united with Christ. We have an arduous journey ahead of us because we *will* face temptations and sin.

We reach the top of the ladder step-by-step, one small goal at a time. How do we know which goals we should make for ourselves in order to achieve progress forward toward our ultimate goal of theosis? Each time we find ourselves turning away from God, whatever the reason or cause, we should strive to immediately return to God by repenting and going to Confession. Our Father Confessor can provide guidance for our specific needs - and this guidance provides us with a small goal, or rung on the ladder, that we can use to climb closer to God.

It is also important that we seek forgiveness from those we have hurt, offended, or have wronged. We do this by directly asking the person to forgive us. This can be an incredibly difficult and humbling experience, but also one that will bring us much peace afterwards. This is such an



important aspect of our relationships with each other that we have a service directly dedicated to seeking forgiveness from one another. This service is called Forgiveness Vespers. Watch for it in the bulletin when Great Lent is approaching.

## PARABLES

A parable is a story, using an example from everyday life, which contains an important lesson about God.

At the time of these parables, the people had a good understanding of farming - growing food and raising animals. Today, many of us are not as familiar with farming practices. We are going to have a fun activity today to help us learn more about how wheat was processed, in order to better understand the parables about wheat in the Bible.

## VOCABULARY: SEPARATING WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF

*“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Luke 3:17)*



Photo credit: [Lawrence OP](#)

Let’s look at this verse a little closer and first learn the terminology that is being used here. Then we will learn what is being taught by St. John when he said this to the people gathered around him.

Wheat is what we use to make bread and it grows as a tall grass. When the wheat is harvested, there is much work still to be done before you have the wheat kernels or berries that you will use to grind to make flour.

**What is threshing?** Threshing is the process of removing the seeds from the stem or stalk of the plant. Oftentimes, many people would gather together to thresh the wheat together. They would take big bundles of wheat and hit the bundles against a hard surface, dislodging the grain.

A **threshing floor** is the area where the threshing takes place. Oftentimes, this was a circular area outside, cleared of any debris that might make it difficult to find the wheat kernels when they were done.

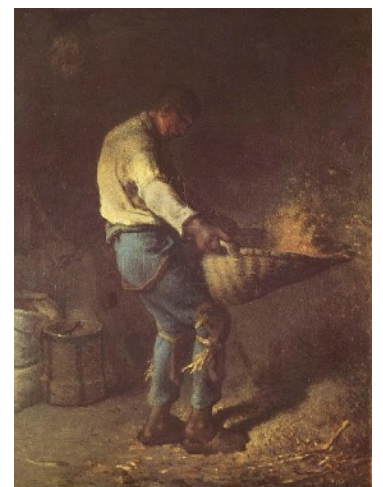


Threshing grains  
Photo credit: [Jayaseerlourdhuraj](#)



Threshing floor in Naxos, Greece  
Photo credit: [Zde](#)

**What is winnowing?** Winnowing is the process of separating the wheat from the chaff. Sometimes this was done by using a special basket that allowed you to easily shake and drop the wheat kernels to the ground as the wind blew away the chaff. Other times, they would use a winnowing fork and toss the wheat into the air, and again, allow the chaff to blow away as the wheat dropped to the ground.



**How can I tell the difference between the wheat and the chaff?** The wheat is the small seed that grows at the tip of the wheat grass plant. This seed will provide new life to another wheat plant. The chaff is the outer, inedible hull of the wheat kernel. The chaff is papery-thin and will easily blow away.



(Left) Chaff; (Right) Wheat  
Photo credit: [Archibale Isolation](#)

In our current age, we have special machinery that will thresh and winnow the wheat for the farmers, but we are going to learn for ourselves how to first thresh the wheat at our station outside and then winnow the rest to find all the wheat kernels.

## MEANING: SEPARATING WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF

*“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”* (Luke 3:17)

“His” is referring to Christ. When we see “His” and “He” capitalized in the Bible, this is always in reference to Jesus.

The threshing floor is judgement.

We are the field of the Lord. The wheat are those of us who have been fruitful and righteous. The chaff are those of us who have been easily blown around by those around us, succumbing to temptations, and barren of any good fruit.

The wheat and chaff are still mingled together at this point and will be separated (winnowed) by the angels at the time of judgement.

The wheat is gathered into the barn (heaven) and the chaff is burned (hell).

We learn that it is so critically important to repent with sincere sorrow for our sins and a deep desire to be reunited with God.

How do we repent? By going to Confession when we have “missed the mark” and seeking to be reunited with God.

Father Vasile has times listed in the weekly bulletin when he is at the church and available for Confessions. You can also make an appointment with him directly if you cannot get to church during these times. Confession is also available when we have our Saturday Nativity Retreat just before Christmas and also when we have our Saturday of Lazarus Retreat during Great Lent.



Icon: Parable of the Wheat and Tares  
Matthew 14:24-30  
Photo credit: [Fikos](#)

# JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

## AT HOME

### FOR PARENTS

**T**he image of true repentance is found in the Gospel, in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

*The Prodigal Son remembered all that he had in his father's home, and how much he lost, and then he wanted with all his being to return.*

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Liturgy and Life: Christian Development  
Through Liturgical Experience

### Available in our church bookstore:

“Repentance and Confession, Return to God and His Church” by St. Nikodemos Publications

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We teach our children both directly through the instructions we provide them and also indirectly through our daily, lived example.

Our children notice our priorities and the choices we make. Let them hear us seek forgiveness from one another and see us going to Confession.

In this way, we help to lay the foundation of the importance of repentance in our healing process.

## HOME ACTIVITY #7

### Discuss and prepare to go to Confession:

- [Preparation for Holy Confession](#) - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese
- Ask your family to forgive you when you have done something to hurt or upset them.

