*Moments of Generosity for Advent 3*

**A Reflection on the objects of Luke 3**

-“You brood of **vipers**.”—An insult, maybe even the 1st century equivalent of “you SOB”… but something more too… a viper, a snake. Yeah, you know the one I’m talking about—Genesis 3. The snake asking, “Did God say” and then widening the Law, expanding it to cover every tree, not simply one single fruit, inserting doubt and discord into the discourse of paradise. In this haranguing John gives, there is something of Genesis 3 there. There is a common threat—God doesn’t provide enough. God doesn’t provide enough Eve, God doesn’t provide enough coats and food, enough money and wages. Do we not hold too tight, eating up everything, ingesting the fruit just to make sure it doesn’t leave us? Doesn’t that cry snake into your heart from time to time? Not enough! Not enough!

-Speaking of **fruits** and **trees**, clearly there is a call back to the garden, a world with enough and to spare. But we also know of another type of generosity—gleaning, the fruits and produce of all sorts not gathered up on the first go, is given to the needy (Leviticus 19:9, Deuteronomy 24:20, etc). Again, it produces enough, there is enough to be generous. Then of course, there are the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) certainly important traits for keeping a decent equilibrium, keeping us from chasing after “not enough, not enough.” Yes, these three things, snakes, fruits, and trees insist we reflect upon that early defining story.

-As for the **Ax**, we look quickly to the absence of a tree, the Davidic family tree, cut down by Babylon, named as a punishment for not heeding the prophets, but also as a deep and painful tragedy. Yet those same prophets give promise of new growth, from the stump of Jesse (David’s father) shall come a new branch, a sprig of green, hope!

-What then is repentant fruit? Clothing the naked with your excess **coats**. What then is repentant fruit? Feeding the hungry with your excess **food**. Is *that* not the true fast required by God in Isaiah 58? Is it not the workings of true faith found in James 2? Is it not the culmination of the Parables of the Kingdom found in Matthew 25? Is this not the repentance the rich man begs Lazarus to preach to his five brothers?

-But, that’s so general, how ought that work in the day to day of our real lives? How does non-general repentant fruit taste? It tastes like **tax collectors** not skimming off the top when they do their dubious deeds. But really! How does non-general repentant fruit taste? It tastes like **Soldiers** not intimidating and taking. Like lost Zacchaeus they return ill-gotten gain. Like the dishonest manager they are to stop playing the “one for the Empire, one for me” game to get rich. They don’t build barns of stuff they cannot keep. No, they are to be satisfied.

-As for **fire** it plays a dual role, yes it destroys the chaff, and the trees that do not bear good fruit, but it also signifies the baptism of Spirit—the movement of Pentecost that Luke will write about in the Acts of the Apostles.

-Finally, there is the **wheat** and the **chaff** which brings us back to the beginning, separating out that which is fruitful from that which is not. I can’t express with words the particulars of this, so simply [click here](https://youtu.be/nuYYI0DLgkA), [here](https://youtu.be/HzZUlP69q40), or [here](https://youtu.be/zN7lgu8t0is) to watch a few videos about wheat and chaff in order to get a better feel of what is being described.

**A Wheat and Chaff Children’s Sermon:**

You will need a bag of peanuts or sunflower seeds and two sealable sandwich bags.

Crack the nuts open and create two sandwich bags, one filled with the shells and the other with the seeds.

Gather the children around and ask them which bag they would rather have, and why. They will likely tell you about how the seeds/nuts are yummy and the shells are not.
Then talk to them about threshing, separating out wheat and chaff—John is describing a baptism that seeks out the fruitful, tasty, useful bits of the plant.

So too, part of what it means to be baptized children of God is that we get to discover the parts of our lives, especially our lives lived out in relationships and roles, that are fruitful, tasty, and useful.

[**Lilly and Pastor Silly Episode 1**](https://youtu.be/jl9_bvuhynA)