

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year B

GOSPEL

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The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way.

A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his path straight;

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

(Mark 1:1-8)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- John the Baptist is a prominent figure in Mark's Gospel. In Luke's Gospel, he is portrayed as a cousin of Jesus, but in the other gospels he seems not to know the identity of Jesus and no family connection is mentioned.
- John's clothing of homespun camel hair tied with a leather thong around the waist is the explicit garb of a prophet.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The prophet Isaiah brought a message of hope and comfort to the people of Israel who were in exile in Babylon. Despite their failings, God is merciful and has promised them a new beginning. John the Baptist appears in the line of that great prophet and again promises Israel the chance of a new beginning if they repent and turn again towards God.

The emphasis in Mark's portrait of the Baptist is very much that of the subordinate. John's self-effacing manner makes it clear that he is not the one who is promised, but the one who is to prepare the way. The emphasis in John's preaching is on judgment; for Jesus it is the reign of God and salvation.

- Advent is also a time of new beginnings, and John the Baptist's 'voice in the wilderness' is a personal invitation to each of us to prepare a way for the Lord into our lives now. What special preparation for Christmas will you undertake this year? How may this be different from what you have done in the past?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Who are the people who have helped you to come to the way of the Lord? Who are the people who act as God's messengers for you?
- Are there obstacles that need to be removed to make a straight path for the Lord? What stops you from focusing on God?
- To repent is to have a change of heart or mind. Have you ever had a change of heart or mind over a significant person, issue or task that has led to a new approach or new way of thinking? Discuss your experiences together.
- The wilderness or the desert can be a silent and frightening place—and yet it is into this silence that both John and Jesus withdraw to pray. For them it became a place of deep intimacy with God. Is Advent a time to retreat into the wilderness within and listen for the voice whose cries are often missed in the busyness of life?
- Think about the times or places when you are most attuned to God's presence and God's voice. Make time this week to spend a while in this wilderness within, listening to the voice that is there.
- Repeat these words often this week and act on them in a small way each day:

Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths.

