



Matthew 3:1-12

1 In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 2 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' 3 This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said: 'A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.' 4 This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, 6 and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. 7 But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 8 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, 9 and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father", because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. 11 I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

Other readings: Isaiah 11:1-10 Psalm 71 (72) Romans 15:4-9

On the second Sunday of Advent we are introduced to another great Advent figure, John the Baptist. Matthew has him preach, like Jesus, about the coming of the kingdom of heaven. His preaching fulfils the words found in the prophet Isaiah about 'a voice crying in the wilderness'.

John is dressed like a prophet and lives in the wilderness. Those who come to him receive a baptism of repentance for their sins. John fiercely attacks those who have relied on their status and their traditions for their salvation. They have relied on being 'children of Abraham' and have become complacent. For John, the love of God is not limited to the chosen race, and all men and women are called to produce good fruit.

John's principal task is to point to the 'one who follows me'. This one is more powerful and will bring a new baptism, in the Holy Spirit. With the preaching of John the Baptist, the liturgy is preparing us for the coming of Christ.

Do I listen out for the voice of the prophet crying in the wilderness of this world?

Do I rely on my 'status' as a Christian rather than striving to live as one?

Let us pray for true repentance.

Let us pray for courage in living and proclaiming God's good news.