

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

JOHN THE BAPTISER

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Prepare the way (Luke 3:1-6)

The Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Advent is Luke's account of how John the Baptist prepared for the ministry of Jesus. For Luke, John is no longer portrayed as the returned Elijah, but as the last of the long line of prophets. Now John's message 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight', leads directly to the proclamation 'and all flesh shall see the salvation of God'. There is here the note of confidence that the salvation brought by Jesus is for the whole world, not only for the Jewish nation.

Our image to stimulate reflection on Luke's teaching about preparing the way for Jesus is *John the baptiser*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Luke 3: 3-4,6; for reflection throughout the week)

John went into all the region around the Jordan,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,
as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,
'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
John the baptiser
came to prepare the way
for your birth in Bethlehem.
Inspire us by John's example
to prepare for your coming
on Christmas Day;
for you are our God,
now and always.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Luke 3: 1-6

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ’

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Luke 3: 1-6)

Begin to explore how Luke introduces John the baptiser as the one preparing the way for Jesus by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Why is Luke giving so much attention to establishing the historical context?
- Why is Luke referring to John as the son of Zechariah?
- What is the significance of Luke quoting from Isaiah?
- What is the importance for Luke of the verse ‘and all flesh shall see the salvation of God’?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

See how Luke develops what he found in Mark. What does he leave out and what does he add?

- Mark 1: 2-6

See how Luke had already added material about the birth of John.

- Luke 1: 5-25

Explore how Luke expands on Mark’s brief reference to Isaiah.

- Isaiah 40: 3-5

Explore similar images in Isaiah.

- Isaiah 42: 10
- Isaiah 45: 2
- Isaiah 52: 10

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (YEAR C) Sunday 8 December 2024

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of how Luke introduces John the baptiser as the one preparing the way for Jesus by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Godspell – Prepare ye the way of the Lord
- John the Baptist in art
- John the Baptist in the Gospel of Luke

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on applying to Advent Luke's teaching about preparing the way for Jesus is *John the baptiser*. Draw on your own experience of encountering John the baptiser. For example:

- What images of John the Baptist stay in your mind?
- What music or hymns about John the Baptist inspire you?
- How have you found John the Baptist helps you prepare for Advent?

What have you learned about John the baptiser?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Luke's teaching about preparing the way for Jesus, or by the image of John the baptiser.

- Make a collage of Advent images preparing the way for Jesus.
- Create a poster illustrating a range of images of John the Baptist.
- Make a life-size model of John the Baptist, perhaps clothing a dummy clothes model.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of Advent preparation for the coming of Jesus, or on the image of John the baptiser.



**Liverpool
Cathedral**

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

Our invitation then is for you to share your reflections, prayers and photos of your creative work with the Cathedral by emailing them to smc.lesliefrancis@gmail.com.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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