

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

CHRISTMAS CARDS

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Prepare the way (Matthew 3: 1-12)

The Gospel reading is Matthew's account of how John the Baptist prepared for the ministry of Jesus. John makes good use of the text from the prophet Isaiah, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' Matthew's account emphasises the messages of judgement and of conflict with God's unrepentant people, 'Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' There is here a note of urgency in the message.

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's theme of preparation during Advent for Jesus' coming is *Christmas cards*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Matthew 3: 1-3; for reflection throughout the week)

In those days John the Baptist
appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,
'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'
This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,
'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
We prepare for your coming by sending and receiving cards.
Teach us to remember you
in every card we send
and in every greeting we receive;
that we may be ready
to celebrate your birth on Christmas Day.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Matthew 3: 1-12

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." '

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

'I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT (YEAR A) Sunday 7 December 2025

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Matthew 3: 1-12)

Begin to explore Matthew's teaching about being prepared during Advent for the coming of 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.

- How do you understand John's message 'Prepare the way of the Lord'?
- Why does Matthew give attention to John's clothing?
- Why does Matthew add his diatribe against the Pharisees and Sadducees?
- What do you make of the imagery of the threshing floor?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore how Matthew develops what he found in Mark. What does he add? What does he omit?

- Mark 1: 2-8
- Exodus 23: 20

Explore the imagery of John's dress in the Old Testament.

- 2 Kings 1: 3-8

Explore the origin of John's message in the Old Testament.

- Isaiah 40: 3-8
- Malachi 4: 4-6

Explore common themes in Matthew's Gospel.

- Matthew 7: 16-19
- Matthew 12: 33-34
- Matthew 13: 30
- Matthew 23: 13, 15, 29-33

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Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Matthew's teaching about being prepared during Advent for the coming of Jesus by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel
- History of Christmas cards
- Making Christmas cards

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's teaching about being prepared during Advent for the coming of Jesus is *Christmas cards*. Draw on your experience of Christmas cards. For example:

- What are your early memories of giving and receiving Christmas cards?
- When has receiving a Christmas card been really special for you?
- How does giving and receiving Christmas cards help you prepare for Christmas?

What have you learned about giving and receiving Christmas cards?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by the way in which Matthew introduces John the Baptist as preparing the way for Jesus.

- Make Christmas cards that link to preparing for Jesus.
- Create a collage illustrating a range of Christmas cards.
- Make a mural of John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus or on the image of Christmas cards.



**Liverpool
Cathedral**

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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.

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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