

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

WRAPPING PRESENTS

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

John the Baptist (Matthew 11: 2-11)

John the Baptist holds a prominent place in the season of Advent since he is seen as the forerunner who prepares the way for Jesus. In this passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus invites the crowds to reflect on their experiences of John. It is not sufficient simply to be curious about John, we need to penetrate the surface appearances to see what stands behind them. We need to come to a clear view on John's place in God's plans for the people of God. John is the forerunner promised in scripture to prepare the way for the Messiah.

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

Core extract from the Gospel (Matthew 11: 10-11; for reflection throughout the week)

This is the one about whom it is written,
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."
Truly I tell you, among those born of women
no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist;
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
John the Baptist prepared for your coming.
Let John's message stir our hearts,
so we are ready to welcome you
on Christmas Day;
for you are the one for whom we are preparing.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Matthew 11: 2-11

Messengers from John the Baptist

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

Jesus Praises John the Baptist

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Matthew 11: 2-11)

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.

- Why was John in prison?
- What are the signs of the Messiah pointed out to John?
- Review the promised signs of the Messiah in Isaiah 35: 1-7 and Isaiah 61: 1-3, but missing from the list sent back to John in prison.
- Who is Matthew saying John is?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore how Matthew shares this narrative with Luke.

- Luke 7: 18-35

Explore the background to Matthew's account of John the Baptist.

- Matthew 3: 1-6
- Matthew 14: 1-7

Explore the background to the message sent back to John the Baptist.

- Isaiah 35: 1-7
- Isaiah 61: 1-3
- Matthew 9: 27-31 (healing the blind)
- Matthew 9: 1-8 (healing the lame)
- Matthew 8: 1-4 (healing the leper)
- Matthew 9: 32-34 (healing the dumb/deaf)
- Matthew 9: 18-19, 23-25 (raising the dead)

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT (YEAR A) Sunday 14 December 2025

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.

- Commenting on Matthew 11: 2-11
- History of wrapping Christmas presents
- Wrapping Christmas presents

Drawing on experience

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

- What are your early memories of wrapping and unwrapping Christmas presents?
- When has wrapping or unwrapping Christmas presents been really special for you?
- What encourages the spirit of generosity at Christmas?

What have you learned about wrapping presents?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Matthew's teaching about John the Baptist's encounter with Jesus, or by the image of wrapping presents.

- Create a collage illustrating the 'signs' that Jesus sent back to John.
- Make a poster illustrating Matthew's teaching about who John the Baptist is.
- Assemble a display of wrapped Christmas presents.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of John the Baptist or on the image of wrapping presents.



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.

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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