

**Sermon Notes:** December 7, 2025

**Focus:** John the Baptist be like... prepare!

[Lectionary](#)

**No Santa for you yet!** John is out by the river preaching about a *brood of vipers* and axes already swung at the roots of the trees. He's utterly unfazed by how his words might get him in trouble. This of course is exactly what happens next week when he's thrown in prison. Before jail and his untimely beheading, he called out anyone who abused their religious, financial, or military privilege. John saw no fundamental difference between rich and poor, powerful and persecuted. He wanted everyone to wake up to God's way and then actually *do something* that made that way more accessible for everyone.

The gospel today wants you to come to know Jesus as the fulfillment of peace and long-delayed promise. John had known from a young age that God was turning a new page in his people's life. I imagine this wasn't the first time he said, "The kingdom of God has come near," but it might have been the first time he really *felt* it in his bones as he preached to a crowd. From that bone-deep place, he was embodying Isaiah's words: "Prepare the way of the Lord." And even after Jesus' baptism, it wasn't a one-and-done spiritual high. John still had moments of uncertainty. This uncertainty peaked in prison. "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" he pleads from behind bars.

John was pointing toward the way of God and a straight path into the very heart of God. It is both gift and responsibility. It is personal, political, and systemic. Today, it's never been just *you and Jesus*. It's you, Jesus, family, world, and work in a never-ending tap dance. John never turned his ministry into an exclusive love-fest between him and his cousin. So, in the Spirit of John:

- **Let contentment replace fear** Bootstrappers and haters of the poor can't co-opt to the kingdom of God's equality.
- **Let money be money** We don't become richer or more valuable by worshiping people who have lots of it. Being satisfied with what we have settles our presence and opens us to the future. The kingdom of God is abundance.
- **Be satisfied with who you are** If you're constantly obsessed with the "next step," you miss the gift of the people right in front of you. You can improve yourself, sure. But, God's kingdom brings out the best in all of us and helps us see one another more clearly.

**Step aside John** Matthew describes John as the great "step-asider." Jesus is the one more powerful than John who is coming after him. John says, "I'm not worthy to carry his sandals." Jesus is in charge, which means we don't have to try so hard to make everyone and everything conform to our will. There's real emotional relief in getting out of your own head with some humility. To step aside is both delightful and deeply disorienting.

As we prepare in Advent, how are we making the world better? At the same time how are we settling into the gift of just existing? Between the two, how are we seeking a

peace that passes all understanding? That peace is the glue between improving and resting. Lastly, I want to get into the nerdy weeds of some titles and words connected to John. Skip to “Advent icon” if that is not for you.

**John, βαπτιστής** “the Baptist,” literally the one who immerses. His title is a verb turned into a name. He is what he does. Also, he was clearly John “the rockstar preacher,” but that did not make it into the Greek.

**John, προφήτης** “a prophet,” and not just a prophet but **πλείων προφήτου**: “more than a prophet.”

**John, φωνή βοῶντος** “the voice of one crying out.” He is sounding the arrival of “the Word” aka Jesus. We are not called to be the Messiah but are called to be voices of peace and hope.

**John ἀγγελός** (Jesus quoting Malachi) “my messenger.” I really like this because John tells us today that our vocation is not to be extraordinary, but work-a-day doordashers of God’s good news.

**John, ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος** “a man sent from God.” In a world obsessed with who has the most, John was downwardly mobile. He was a Nazarene who never drank and was dedicated as a child to his mission. Despite these sanctified beginnings, his title at the center of his ministry is *sent one*.

**John πρόδρομος**, “the forerunner” He does not compete with Jesus; he clears the lane. Advent spirituality is distilled into this one word: forerunning. He does not get this title from scripture, but from the early church writings.

**John, hinge** he is a hinge in scripture. He is a late comer to ancient Israel’s prophetic tradition and the first voice announcing the coming of his cousin, Jesus. Ancient hope and a new dawn.

**John is a kind of Advent icon for us:**

- a voice that makes space
- a messenger who helps us prepare
- a prophet who points away from himself
- a baptizer of new beginnings
- a forerunner who does not trip on his own ego

John’s life is a reminder that the church’s job is not to predict God’s arrival, but to prepare for it; not to possess the light, but to bear witness to it; not to be the Christ, but to make room for God’s presence to be enjoyed and celebrated every day.

**Todd**