

## Gospel Reflection Advent 2A

December 8, 2013

### Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, <sup>2</sup>“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”<sup>3</sup>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.’”<sup>4</sup> Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.<sup>5</sup> Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, <sup>6</sup>and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup>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? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruit worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>Even now the ax 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. <sup>11</sup>“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. <sup>12</sup>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.”

### Reflection

Imagine the story this way: *Out in the countryside, several miles drive from the city, off a local dirt road, a man named John was telling all passers-by that God was coming soon and they needed to get their acts together. Now John was dressed in a pair of old blue jeans that he’d found in a dumpster and a tatty sweatshirt, and he ate roots he dug, insects he caught and whatever people gave him. There was a river where John was, and he was telling people they needed to be washed in that river – baptized as a sign that they had chosen to follow God’s way. The funny thing is that some people didn’t just come for the entertainment or to shake their heads at another religious nut. There was something about him . . .*

*It was amazing who showed up, without John advertising or having any PR people at all. People you’d never expect. It wasn’t like John was telling them what they wanted to hear. Instead, he was being honest – warning them that some of their choices in life were destructive – to them and to others. He warned them that there are real consequences, but that it was not quite too late. He told them in the bluntest possible language that God urgently wanted them to choose a better, more loving way – or else! Some actually chose to be baptized – to take it seriously. As they did what John told them they discovered that they were beginning to live with kindness, simplicity, and genuine joy.*

*One day a whole crowd of religious leaders and wealthy business leaders and media people showed up. They listened from around the fringes of the crowd for a long time. Then some began to work their way to the front to stand with those who had chosen to enter the water.*

*John stared at them – disbelieving his eyes. The language he used to describe them was . . . impolite . . . at best. He warned them that he wasn’t playing games, and that this baptism was for real – not just the popular thing to do. He warned them to look at their arrogance, at some of the mess they had made in their lives and the lives of those they touched and that they didn’t have a lot of time to change for the better. God was coming soon – and seriously ticked off.*

*Some of the religious, business and media people drove off in a huff. They had taken their valuable time and given this weirdo the courtesy of coming out to the middle of nowhere to hear him. Some of them, though, stayed and were baptized alongside people with whom they could never have imagined being in the same room . . .*

Can you imagine yourself somewhere in this story? Who are you? How are you reacting to John? To those around you? Is there anything you need to leave behind in the river?