

## Mission Reflection

*for the Season of Advent*

Seafarers International House



### Scripture

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.”

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”<sup>1</sup>

### Message

We wait and watch during the season of Advent for the second coming of Christ, and while theologians differ on when and how the second coming will occur, there is consensus that right now God is dissatisfied with the world.<sup>2</sup> We are warned by John the Baptist to repent and to turn away from “the values and practices of the old age.”<sup>3</sup> Given the fleeting days of shopping opportunities in the mere weeks of Advent, most of us don’t sense a lot of time to wait and watch, and even less interest in contemplating the “old age”.

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Of course, we need not search too far back to encounter the evil ways against which John the Baptist railed – idolatry, violence, injustice, exploitation, slavery and scarcity. Today, we all but worship Mammon. We condone violence and collateral damage throughout the world. We cloak exploitation as deregulated markets. We recreate slavery through our system of bail bonds. And we covet whatever is scarce as personal property, not community property.

It isn't as if we lack for things from which we might repent. It's just so unpleasant to think about, and we're all too busy now to take time out for introspection. At some point, however, we start to resemble the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to the river for a leveraged quick dip in the Jordan: *You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.* The process of waiting, watching and repenting cannot be accomplished in just one hour in the pew in the four weeks of Advent. So, this might be an excellent season to recalibrate our faith – serve the poor, advocate for the powerless and encourage community togetherness.

### Prayer

Help us, Lord, to offer generously our prayers, our commitment and our active efforts to fix this broken world, that we might produce fruit in keeping with our repentance. Amen.

1. Matthew 3:1-12
2. Ron Allen, "Commentary on Matthew 3:1-12", Working Preacher, December 4, 2016.
3. Ibid

**Postscript:** Through Seafarers International House's mission to seafarers and immigrants, you can bake cookies and pack Christmas-at-Sea satchels for seafarers; and you can visit asylum seekers in detention centers and after they're granted asylum, you can invite them for an overnight visit in your home. Moreover, you can call out the unjust denial of shore leave and the unjust detention of asylum seekers, by writing to our senators ([www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)) and representatives ([www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)). Democracy is a participatory form of government in which we are called to do more than cast an occasional ballot. For more information, log onto Seafarers International House's website ([www.sihnyc.org](http://www.sihnyc.org)).

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It's available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. "Sleep Well By Doing Good."

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