

# JOHN THE BAPTIST

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As I write this essay during the season of Advent 2020, our Sunday lectionary readings turn our attention to one of the most colorful figures found in scripture: John the Baptist.



We are all familiar with the narrative where he “leapt in his mother’s womb” when he, destined to be his cousin Jesus’ herald in the world, first encountered him who was being carried in his own mother Mary’s womb. Most of us have also this image of him as this very imposing “wild man” figure who was clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, eating nothing but locusts and wild honey, and crying in the wilderness in a booming voice for us to recall the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “Prepare the way of our God. Clear a straight path.” He reminded all that, “One more powerful than I is to come after me. I am not fit to stoop and untie his sandal straps.”

His message must have been very effective, for the Gospel of Mark tells us that, “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The *whole* Judean countryside and *all* of the people of Jerusalem went out to John and were baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.” (Emphases mine.) Folks obviously believed that something really special was certainly about to take place, and they wanted “in”!

What made his message even more profound was that he was speaking truth to power: to the occupying Roman forces and the religious authorities. He followed his sacred call by living this austere life and speaking prophetically because he loved God’s people and wanted all to go deeper by inviting them to get to know the Word of God Incarnate. He was the great precursor of Jesus – this Jesus who challenged all to embrace and fulfill the Spirit of the Law rather than merely following the Letter of the Law. As he reminds us, the Law is ultimately based on love.

His message proves that he is indeed a bridge between the prophets of old and this Christ figure – the Logos - who personified Love. One of his greatest admonitions was for all to “repent”. This word comes from Greek, referring to “change your mind.”

For those of us who are members of the LGBTQ+ community and all who work for our full acceptance and inclusion within the church and greater society, the bold, prophetic words and life of John the Baptist should speak loudly to us. As we lovingly yet firmly speak truth to power through sharing our own life stories and providing sound educational and spiritual development opportunities, we are hopefully providing an effective message which invites people to go deeper, want “in” and “change their minds.” For those of us who genuinely profess to follow the teachings of the Word of God Incarnate, we know that it is a lifelong journey of learning how to live them out. My prayer is that we all do our best to serve as bridge-builders as we are constantly preparing the way of a loving, inclusive God who loves us as we have been created.

A blessed Advent and Christmas season to all!