

## It's not me

### Matthew 3.1-12

John the Baptist fulfils the role of Isaiah's prophetic voice, preparing for the Lord's coming. The preparation is repentance and learning to 'bear good fruit' by depending only on God. Our gaze is drawn away from concern with ourselves to see a bigger picture – it's not about us, it's about Jesus.

Now read **Matthew 3.1-12** see p.2 for text.

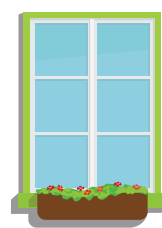
### A note on the passage

John makes it clear that he is preparing the way for Jesus. He has a clear message to the people about the need to change their lives and follow the right path in life. This week, we think about how we follow the right path and how we focus on Jesus and on others as we seek to serve him.

#ADVENT

Each week from now to Christmas, we will focus on one of the names given to Jesus, what it means and how it might connect with your daily life. You will need the Advent tree you prepared last week.

This week, take a gift tag and write on it 'Messiah'. Attach the tag to the tree. Research this name (e.g. on the internet, using books, or by talking with others) – what does Messiah mean? It originally described leaders and kings of Israel, but it has a quite literal meaning. How might that answer connect with your life? How does it feel to know Jesus is your Messiah? Why 'M' rather than 'm'?



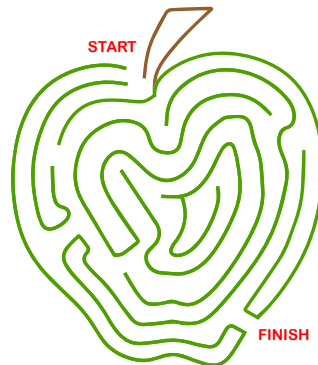
## Window on prayer



Mirrors allow us to look at ourselves. Windows allow us to look outwards. Who walks past your window? Each day, pray for those people – maybe it's neighbours, school children, dog walkers. Pray that they will know joy, peace and hope this Advent season. Draw a window frame. In the window panes write or draw people who may find Christmas difficult for any reason – e.g. the lonely, unwell, bereaved, those facing financial hardships. Each day, pray for those people in one pane, the next day another pane, and so on. Do you know someone who may be finding things difficult? Could you take a card, some home baking or small treat (children to be accompanied by an adult).

## A MAZE

Can you get all the way through the apple maze without hitting one of the brick walls? You will need to make good decisions as you wind your way through. John the Baptist makes it clear that people are to learn to bear good fruit as they depend on him. How might you bear good fruit in your life? Are there things you might need to change? How do you respond if you hit a 'brick wall' or difficult time in life? How might it be possible to depend more on God?



## SIGNS

What are arrows on signs used for? Where might you see arrows? How many different ones can you think of? Did you include road signs? And signs in public places (e.g. theatre) and on transport (planes) to indicate emergency exits? What else? What would happen if there weren't signs? If people drove their cars round roundabouts anyway they chose? John is clear that it is important to lead a life on a path that points to Jesus. What obstacles might prevent any of us from walking on a path focused on Jesus? How can we remove these obstacles that can get in the way? What one change could you make this week to remove any obstacles you are aware of?



Using a phone app or handheld compass, find out which way your front door faces. Slowly turn round in a circle and watch how the compass turns. Go for a short walk, stopping every now and again to see how the compass direction changes depending on which way you turn. As you walk, ask God to help direct your focus to Jesus during this Advent season.

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

**J**ohn the Baptist appeared in the desert. He appeared in clothes made from camel's hair. He wore a leather belt and ate locusts and wild honey. He appeared suddenly, but he had been expected for hundreds of years. The prophet Isaiah had called him 'a voice crying out in the wilderness', telling the people to 'prepare the way of the Lord'.

John was crying out all right. He shouted, 'Repent! The kingdom of heaven has come near.' And the people came to repent. From Jerusalem, Judea and the banks of the River Jordan, they came. They said sorry for their sins and John baptized them in the river.

But when a group of religious leaders came to John, he began to cry out again. 'You brood of vipers!' he shouted. 'It isn't enough just to say sorry, you know. Your actions have to prove that you really are sorry. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "We're related to Abraham, so God will accept us." But that's not enough either. God can make new relatives for Abraham out of the stones in this desert! There is an axe lying on the ground, ready to

be used. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and burned.'

John continued, 'When people say sorry, I baptize them with water, but there is someone coming after me who is more powerful than me. I'm not good enough to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Like a farmer with a winnowing fork, he will separate out the good grain from the unusable chaff. The chaff will be burned with a fire that can't be put out.'

Matthew 3.1-12

## Did you know?

- Old Testament prophets had told of someone who would come before Jesus, to tell others about him.
- John doesn't choose to talk about Jesus in the usual, busy places. Instead, he goes out to the desert. He doesn't name Jesus, but it's clear he's talking about him.

## Matthew 3.1-12 (NRSV)

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' 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."

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

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? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 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. Even now the axe 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.

'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. 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.'