

# The Pause...

I wonder if you've been to the cinema recently? If so, then remember that moment when you're seated, you have your snacks and are waiting, but the lights are still on people are chatting, there's the odd "bing" from a mobile phone.... Then at some point the lights dim and the adverts come on. You wait some more until finally a voice says over the speakers, "Ok, it's the moment you've all been waiting for, so turn off your phones, finish your conversations, it's time for the show." And finally, it's time for the film.

It can't be denied that John the Baptist is an odd character, but he is in effect the "advert" before the main film; he is not the "celebrity" or the one the people are waiting for, but through his cries to "Prepare the way!" he is pointing towards the main event – Jesus. Even though these events actually happened once Jesus was an adult and about to start his ministry, we read this passage during Advent because this season is intended to be a pause: an opportunity to take a break from our usual busyness and activity and take some time to be still, to reflect on ourselves, our faith and whether or not we are ready for the coming of God in our lives.

This season is like the moment when we sit in the cinema in semi-darkness, waiting for the main event. In so many ways, it is near impossible to take moments of stillness in the busyness of December, but for that reason, it's also essential to have the opportunity to centre ourselves on the coming of God in the form of a child, to live and walk among us. That's what Advent is about and that's what it means to prepare the way of the Lord. It's the quiet just before the main show begins.

## Matthew 3:1-12

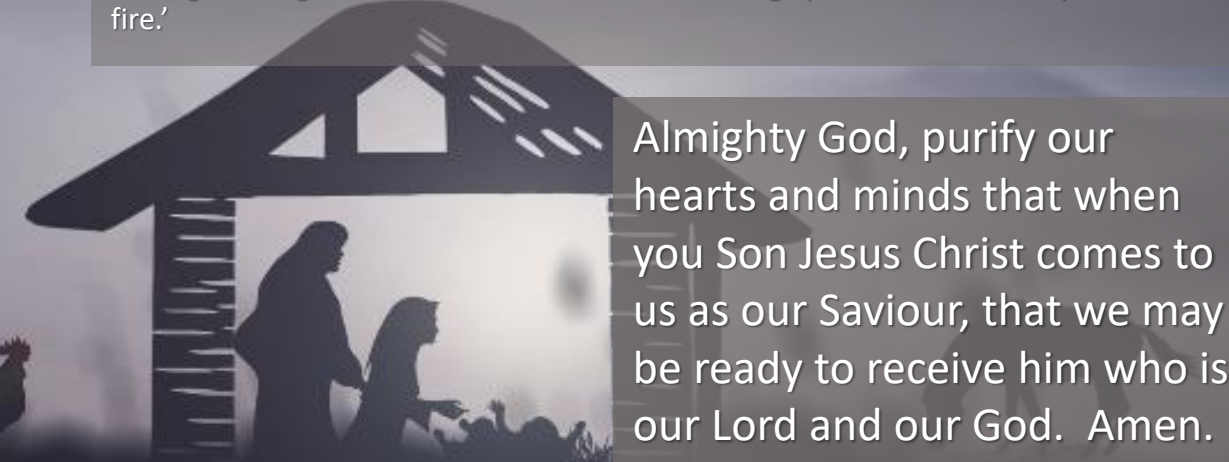
In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

'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 round 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 baptised by him in the River Jordan.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, 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 axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

'I baptise 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 baptise 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.'



Almighty God, purify our hearts and minds that when you Son Jesus Christ comes to us as our Saviour, that we may be ready to receive him who is our Lord and our God. Amen.