



Dec. 4, 2022 Mt. 3: 1-12 & Is. 11: 1-10

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Rolheiser, Fr. Ron [Lighting Advent Candles](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Like today, times were tough. The average person lived a life of frustration and fear. The people, who were supposed to be your advocates to God, seemed to be getting in your way to God. God seems to have gone silent. Was it even worth trying? If asked today for my religious affiliation, I might say NONE. Now, finally, a new word from an unlikely source. It looks like my long wait is about to be over. Should I go out and see what is going on? I hear that John tells of a great one who is already just around the corner. This is an imagined inner conversation of a person trying to decide if they will take the risk and open themselves to what God seems to be doing. We see two candles lit on our Advent tree this week so I have a little more light to go by. Can I open myself this Advent in a new way?

Mt. 3: 1-12

1 In those days **John the Baptist** came, preaching in the **Desert of Judea** 2 and saying, "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is near." 3 This is he who was spoken of through the **prophet Isaiah**: "A voice of one calling in the **desert**, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" 4 **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**. 5 People went out to him **from Jerusalem** and all **Judea** and the **whole region of the Jordan**. 6 **Confessing their sins**, they were **baptized** by him in the **Jordan River**. 7 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**? 8 **Produce fruit** in keeping with **repentance**. 9 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**. 10 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. 11 I **baptize** you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will **baptize** you with the **Holy Spirit** and with **fire**. 12 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."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: To repent, it to turn around and look at something in a new way. In what ways have I "repented" this past year?

PRAYER: Dear John the Baptist, we, I need you to call forth someone who will call me to turn around and look at things in a new way, just as those people in the desert so long ago who heard and responded to your call. Please give me a listening ear so as to hear and respond to any of the ways that the Holy Spirit might be awakening my baptismal fire this Advent. Amen

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

JOHN THE BAPTIST / CLOTHES / CAMEL'S HAIR / LEATHER BELT: All these words evoke the desires and hopes of those who came out to hear John. He looked like a prophet, dressed, sounded like a prophet, and probably smelled like one too.

How do you determine who is a prophet of God these days? What are the things you look for?

DESERT OF JUDEA: When the people left Egypt, they spent 40 years wandering in the desert. The desert seems to be the place of thinking and experiencing God in a new way throughout salvation history.

What is it about "deserts" that make them a good place for transitions? Have you have a desert period in your life? What was it like?

REPENT / PREPARE / CONFESSING THEIR SINS / REPENTANCE: These words focus the purpose of Advent. They move us to open ourselves to God's new thing in our lives.

How am I using this Advent time to open myself to God's new thing in my life?

PROPHET ISAIAH: Tradition had it that just before the Messiah could come, the prophet Isaiah would reappear.

If I would have been out in the desert with the people that day, how would I have felt when John (whose name means JYWH is gracious) quoted these words from Isaiah?

DESERT / LOCUSTS / WILD HONEY: It is often thought that existing on these foods was a life of deprivation. In fact, locusts are high in protein and honey in natural sugars. There even exist recipes on how to prepare locusts.

Does knowing this change any of my ideas about the desert or John? How?

FROM JERUSALEM / JUDEA / WHOLE REGION OF THE JORDAN: Large crowds are gathering from all over, which demonstrates the hunger that existed in the people of Jesus' day.

Is there anything about today that reminds me of this same dynamic? Would I have gone out to see and hear John?

JORDAN RIVER / BAPTIZE / BAPTIZED / BAPTIZING: Baptism was beginning to replace temple sacrifices. In John's time people immersed themselves as a cleansing ritual. The Jordan River served as a site to do this, because it was the river that the people of old crossed when they entered into the "Promised Land".

Do I have a River Jordan between me and my "Promised Land"? What needs to be cleansed in me in order to enter into the fullness of the coming Incarnation?

PHARISEES / SADDUCEES / BROOD OF VIPERS: When John compares these people to a brood of vipers, he is in effect comparing them to pagans.

If I had been witness to this encounter, how might I have felt? Would this have scared me or excited me?

WARNED / COMING WRATH: John exposes the entire structure in place as a human contrivance established in defiance of God's very nature. John's God does not sit atop a pyramid of power, but hears the cry of those who are being oppressed and cannot be left unchallenged or ignored.

What things today need to be challenged? How do I feel when I hear preaching or teaching that gets in the way of the God of John and Jesus? What helps me to see what is truly of God and what is just a human contrivance?

ABRAHAM / ROOT OF THE TREES / STONES: Abraham was the root of the Hebrew/Jewish family tree. There was a Hesiodic myth circulating in those days originating in Deucalion /Pyrrha, that when the people threw stones (laas) behind them, people (laos) sprung up. John demolishes the standard argument for belonging to God's people by using a pagan myth.

Do I have any ideas about God that are rooted in teachings or ideas that are false assumptions? Where did they come from?

PRODUCE GOOD FRUIT: A healthy tree produces good fruit. The Pharisees and Sadducees that claimed to be from the tree of Abraham were not producing good fruit.

Are there any barren or blighted trees in my faith garden? Can this Advent be a time to clear out those trees?



HOLY SPIRIT / FIRE: John promises a new kind of baptism. The one to come, who is greater than John, will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Notice the activity of the Spirit now in Matthew.

How will this change the nature of baptism? How might this affect those in the river that day?

WINNOWING FORK / THRESHING FLOOR: The coming one is on the threshing floor with winnowing fork in hand. The time of change is now. Decisions need to be made now.

Do I have a sense of immediacy this Advent? Has world events changed the way I am entering this Advent? What harvest have I achieved this past year that needs to be sorted through?

WHEAT / CHAFF: The chaff is the covering that protects the developing kernel of wheat. When the wheat is ripe and ready to be eaten, the chaff needs to be removed.

Do I have any "chaff" to be removed from my "wheat", so that it can nourish myself and others? How can this Advent season help me to do this winnowing?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 3:1f // Mk. 1: 2-8; Lk. 2-17; Mt. 3:2 // Mt. 4:17; 10:7; Acts 2:38; Mt. 3: 3 // Is. 40:3; Mt.11: 7f; Zech. 13:4; Mt. 3:6 // Mt. 21: 25; Mt. 3:7 // Mt. 12: 34; 23: 33; Is. 59:5; Mt. 3:9 // Jn. 8:33, 39; Rom. 9:7f; Gal. 4:21-31; Mt. 3:11 // Jn. 1, 15, 24-7, 33; Acts 1:5 Mt. 3:12 // Mt. 13: 42, 50; Is. 41:16; Jer. 15:7;

(Notice how similar is Luke's gospel for this text)

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 11: 1-10; Ps. 72: 1-2, 7-8, 12-12, 17; Rom. 15: 4-9; Mt. 3:1-12;

Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 11: 1-10; Ps. 72: 1-7, 18-18; Rom. 15:4-13; Mt. 3:1-12;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

In nature, we are quietly offered countless models of how to give ourselves over to what appears dark and hopeless, but which ultimately is an awakening beyond our imagining. All around us, everything small and buried surrenders to a process that none of the buried parts can see. We call this process seeding and this innate surrender allows everything edible and fragrant to break ground into a life of light that we call spring. As a seed buried in the earth can't imagine itself as an orchid or hyacinth, neither can a heart packed with hurt of a mind filmed over with despair imagine itself loved or at peace. The courage of the seed is that, once cracking, it cracks all the way. To move through the dark into blossom is the work of soul. Mark Nepo

Hope is that virtue by which we desire the kingdom of God, trusting in the promises of Christ, not relying on our own strength but on the grace of God. Fr. Alberic Farbolin

Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are [people] who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. - Frederick Douglass

The line it is drawn / The curse it is cast / The slow one now / Will later be past / The new order is / Rapidly fading. / And the first one now / Will later be last / For the times they are a-changin'. - Bob Dylan

I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept. - Angela Y. Davis

God does not love us if we change, as we almost all think; but God loves us so that we can change. Richard Rohr

John the Baptist is the prophet who rejects the status quo without apology, eats the harsh food of that choice, and wears alternative clothing (why else do they take so much time describing it!) outside his own system of religion and culture—when his mom and dad were of the priestly class ([Luke 1:5-6](#)). He even changes the venue for transformation from temple to river, which was clearly a judgment on the temple system ([John 1:19](#)), and thus he was not trusted or liked by the authorities ([Matthew 21:23-27](#)) Richard Rohr

When you begin to recognize that your own presence here in this world is part of something infinitely bigger than yourself, you feel a sense of obligation awakening within you—a spiritually inspired, soul-level moral imperative to evolve for the sake of the future of the evolutionary process itself. The way you respond to that obligation and to that sense of cosmic responsibility is by demonstrating that the process is profoundly positive—indeed, the process is sacred—through your own example, through your own victory, through your own tangible and unmistakable higher development.~ Andrew Cohen

liminal space (from the Latin *limen* for "threshold") is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where we can begin to think and act in genuinely new ways. Richard Rohr

The word change normally refers to new beginnings. But transformation, the mystery we're examining, more often happens not when something new begins but when something old falls apart. The pain of something old falling apart--chaos--invites the soul to listen at a deeper level. It invites and sometimes forces the soul to go to a new place because the old place is falling apart....Transformation usually includes a disconcerting reorientation. Change can either help people to find a new meaning, or it can cause people to close down and turn bitter. The difference is determined by the quality of your inner life, what we call your "spirituality." Change of itself just happens; but spiritual transformation must become an actual process of letting go, living in the confusing dark space for a while, and allowing yourself to be spit up on a new and unexpected shore. You can see why Jonah in the belly of the whale is such an important symbol for many Jews and Christians. Richard Rohr

Henri Nouwen was once asked: "Are you an optimist?" His reply: "No, not naturally, but that isn't important. I live in hope, not optimism." Teilhard de Chardin once said the same thing in different words when he was accused of being overly-idealistic and unrealistic in the face of all the negative things one sees in the world. A critic had challenged him: "Suppose we blow up the world with a nuclear bomb, what then happens to your vision of a world coming together in peace?" Teilhard's response lays bare the anatomy of hope: "If we blow up the world by nuclear bombs, that will set things back some millions of years, but eventually what Christ promised will come about, not because I wish it, but because God has promised it and, in the resurrection, God has shown that God is powerful enough to deliver on that promise." Hope is precisely that, a vision of life that guides itself by God's promise, irrespective of whether the situation looks optimistic or pessimistic at any given time. Fr. Ron Rolheiser

It is a miserable state to try to live the life of a follower of Jesus without this holy fire of inner conviction and love. Many personalities have been stunted and twisted from trying to live in conformity with laws without love. The end result has often been a stoic life of self-protection, superficial relationships and conformity through fear...What Jesus had to give had to be received into fresh and open minds and spirits. His gift is not an outside addition, but a union of spirits.

Heaps, John. [A Love That Dares to Question: A Bishop Challenges His Church](#). Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans Pub. Col. 1998. Pgs. 64-5.

This prophet John the Baptizer occupies a strategic place in the narrative. Matthew's handling of this material acquaints readers/hearers of the phenomenon of deception and judgmental revelation, an ability that Jesus himself will display shortly. Jesus, who might be said to be John's apprentice (Hollenbach 1982: XXX), learns this aspect of the role of the prophet by association with him. John's revelation about the hidden corruption of the Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7-10) contains also a judgment: "every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (3:10). In fact, the judgment demands the unveiling of hidden motives, desires and actions. Jerome H. Neyrey.

To Matt. 3:1 cf. [The Gospel of the Ebionites](#), (in Epiphanius, *Against Heresies*, XXX.13.6)-In the days of Herod, king of Judea, when Caiaphas was high priest, a certain man named John came baptizing with a baptism of repentance in the river Jordan. He was said to be of the family of Aaron the priest, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and all went out to him.

To Matt. 3:4, 5 cf. XXX.13.4 of above reference-john was baptizing; and Pharisees went out to him and were baptized, and all Jerusalem. Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; his food was wild honey, tasting like manna, like a cake in olive oil.

A brother asked Abba Agathon:” Tell me, Abba, which is greater, physical work or the guarding what lies within?” The Abba replied: “Man is like a tree; physical work is the leaves and guarding what lies within is the fruit. Now it says in the Gospel, ‘Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire’ (Mt. 3:10): clearly, then, all our care should be about the fruit, that is, about guarding the mind. But we also need the protection and adornment of leaves, that is, physical work.”

You see, transformed people transform people, and John’s little offbeat ritual down by the riverside (outside of the temple where his father served) has become for us the very symbol of Christian transformation. Richard Rohr

"To live a religious life takes all the life we have. To live a religious life takes the heart of a hermit, the soul of a mountain climber, the eyes of a lover, the hands of a healer and the mind of a rabbi. It requires total immersion in the life of Christ and complete concentration on the meaning of the Gospel life today. It presumes a searing presence." Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB

Conversion in Christ is more than making some of our attitudes and behavior more acceptable. Conversion is certainly not a self-improvement project. Conversion in Christ brings the ability to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength, and to love each other as we love ourselves. Learning to do this is a painful experience. We have to allow God's word to expose our sinfulness and our failings. We have to allow his word to take us out of our self-centeredness and our obsession always to have our own way. The result, however, is freedom. We will have not simply an external freedom from physical restraints, but we will have the inner freedom to accept God's word in faith and to complete our faith in love. We will have an effective faith that expresses itself in effective action. Our lives will be true and living in truth we will be Christ's disciples and being Christ's disciples we will give glory to God. Fr. Neil Parquette, O.C. S. O.

It is not we who choose to awaken ourselves, but God Who chooses to awaken us. Thomas Merton.

Only when we have made ourselves deeply aware of who we have been, and why we are the way we are, will the thrilling and miraculous potential of who we could be enter into the light of consciousness. Andrew Cohen

What you don’t transform, you will transmit. Richard Rohr

I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I can say is that they must change if they are to get better.
-Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

As far as inner transformation is concerned, there is nothing you can do about it. You cannot transform yourself, and you certainly cannot transform your partner or anybody else. All you can do is create a space for transformation to happen, for grace and love to enter.” Eckhart Tolle

Let us together ask our God for the gift of conversion, the gift of tears, let us ask him to give us open hearts like the Ninevites, open to his call heard in the suffering faces of countless men and women. No more death! No more exploitation! There is still time to change, there is still a way out and a chance, time to implore the mercy of God. - Pope Francis

You create your story, you live in that story, and if you don't like the story, only you can change it... You are the only one who can change your world.-Don Miguel Ruiz

The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.~ M. Scott Peck

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 7-11. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

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Fitzpatrick, Mother Gail. [Seasons of Grace](http://www.theark1.com). Chicago. ACTA Pub. 2000. Pages 178-9