Advent Devotional December 13, 2026

Scripture

John 3:22–30

*22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, and he spent some time there with them
and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there, and
people kept coming and were being baptized. 24 (John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.)*

*25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. 26 They came to John
and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is
baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has
been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have
been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who
stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been
fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."*

Devotion

Jon Mathieu '21

Plenty of ink has been spilled (and church marquees have been arranged) to remind us that "Jesus is the reason for the season." And the reminder is no doubt a good one in a culture so saturated with consumerism and capitalism. We do well to remember that Advent and Christmas are set aside to reflect on the Incarnation, not to fixate on how many gifts we can get our kids or how perfectly we can present our homes to visiting family members.

Today's reading from John 3 may help us extend this reminder beyond just the cultural failures or personal stressors of December. This episode occurs at a critical juncture when Jesus' ministry is taking off, which means John's baptismal ministry is taking a back seat. When John's disciples voice their concern, he doesn't simply reassure them or lecture them on having an abundance mentality. He cuts straight to the theological heart of the matter: "As I already told you, *I am not the Messiah*."

These may be words for us to repeat, and not just for the narcissists or those with savior complexes. The people-pleasers. The Enneagram twos. Those in helping professions. Those in burnout. Say it with me: "I am not the Messiah."

For John, this meant his ministry needed to decrease in order for Jesus' to increase. On the one hand, this idea is quite particular to his role as forerunner to the Messiah. On the other hand, it may hold meaning for us. In order for the hope, peace, joy, and love of God to increase in the lives of those around me, perhaps my ego, my anxiety, my insecurity, my jealousy, my striving must decrease.

Prayer

God, I am not the Messiah. Whatever is currently active in my life that must decrease—whatever strife, discontentment, pride, despair—please help me address it. May I come to project instead the profound hope found in the birth of Jesus the Messiah.