Advent Devotional December 16, 2026

Scripture

Mark 1:1–8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way,
3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight,' "

4 so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Devotion

The Rev. Jo Ramsey' 99

The year: 1223. The place: Greccio, Italy. The person: St. Francis of Assisi, who created the very first living nativity scene as backdrop for his Christmas Eve mass. The set included just a manger filled with hay and two live animals, an ox and donkey, against the backdrop of a small cave.

During the Renaissance, wealthy families began commissioning their own nativity sets. Soon, an assortment of biblical characters appear at the manger, including shepherds, angels, and kings.

Who would you be if you could travel back to that Holy Night? A tired shepherd—busy working, unprepared for angels to interrupt your life with an invitation to meet the Divine? A watchful wise one—searching the skies for a star to follow? The innkeeper— unable to fit anyone or anything else, until something moves you to make space for an unexpected birth? Or maybe you'd be one of the Christmas characters missing from the nativity– aging Elizabeth, silent Zechariah, or their baby John, who will grow up to be 'different.'

For some reason, we never find *that* family at the manger. But Mark isn't interested in the nativity story anyway. He does feature John front-and-center as his Gospel begins—but not John, the miracle baby. No, Mark's Good News introduces us to adult-John: the misfit loner who wears scratchy clothes and eats bugs. John wants action—radical repentance, prophecies fulfilled, disruptive transformation. This John doesn't exactly give off a cozy Christmas vibe.

If you find your place at the manger this Christmas, wonderful! But if you feel like you don't fit in, are tired of nostalgia, or are longing for change, you aren't alone. John the Baptist is your guy! He stands beside you in the wilderness, waiting for a new beginning, for the Good News that God is coming in real and authentic ways which will reshape our paths and send us in new directions.

Prayer

Gracious God, You welcome everyone to the manger. May those who feel content this Christmas find deep joy in Your presence. May those who feel impatient find hope that change will come. And may those who feel like they don't fit in find themselves embraced by Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.