

The Word of God comes to us to awaken our hearts.

So we begin by praying: God our Father, send Your Spirit upon us now, that we may meet Jesus in the Word that comes from you. May we come to know him, may we come to love him more deeply, and so be drawn closer to the happiness of your Kingdom. Amen.

Matthew 3:1-12

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 baptised 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 baptise 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 baptise 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.'

"The coming of God in Christ still continues today..." Maria Boulding

HEARING ~ Speak Lord, your servants are listening! You have the words of eternal life!

We read the passage 2-3 times. Reflect and share on **some** of the following:

1. What words or phrases strike a chord with you—either in a positive or in a negative way?
2. What is John the Baptist saying to the people?
3. Who is going out to hear John speak?
4. What does John have to say to the religious leaders?
5. How does John describe the one who is coming after him? How do you feel about this 'one who is coming'?



HAPPENING ~ Speak Lord, your servants are listening!

Read the text again and reflect and share on **some** of the following:

1. *"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."* Who is like John the Baptist calling us towards a genuine change of heart?"
2. *"The people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him..."* To whom in our world today do people flock to hear? To whom do we look to for guidance, for leadership, for hope?
3. *"Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor.'" What can we do to help build communities where leaders produce good fruit? What "presumptions" - about God or about life - do we see shaping people's actions today?*
4. *"He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* What situations in your life, in your community, in the world, do you see the fire of the Spirit alive?

