

Advent 2, Year A

- As we begin this second week of Advent, we hear from one of my all time favorite people in Scripture, which is of course John the Baptist
- I love John for a lot of different reasons – because he’s such a colorful character, for one – dwelling in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey
- He wears clothing of camel’s hair, clothing that is designed specifically to be uncomfortable
- He’s the type of prophet that we would at the very least look a little askance at, and likely find a little difficult to take seriously
- And yet, here he is, a central figure in all four Gospels, a figure the Evangelists take great pains to show is in total continuity with the Old Testament prophetic tradition
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- One of my favorite artistic portrayals of John the Baptist is in a larger work called the Isenheim altarpiece, a riveting and breathtaking work of art that was designed to sit behind the altar at a monastery
- In that work, a very haggard John the Baptist is pictured next to the crucified Christ, pointing toward him, and around him are the words the evangelist who shares his name attributes to John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease”
- Because that’s what John the Baptist does – points toward Jesus rather than himself, urges us to prepare the way of the Lord, to make his paths straight
- Encourages us to get out of our own way and keep our eyes open
- Because it is pretty easy for us to forget that the thing most likely to get in the way between us and God is us ourselves
- Our concerns, our desires, our wants and our worries
- This is what the prophets, all along, throughout the tradition, are trying to tell us
- To let go of ourselves a little bit, and to put God at the center of our lives
- To think about the unexpected nature of the interruption that God so often presents – never moreso than in the Incarnation
- And it’s for that reason, because of that prophetic message to stay awake, to pay attention and expect the unexpected, that the season of Advent, just like Lent, offers a great opportunity to step back and take stock of our life in the faith
- To try to do that work of preparing the way of the Lord, of making God’s paths straight
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- If we aren't careful and don't take time to think about God and our faith regularly, then it's possible to romanticize the story of our faith – either to think that it fits into the easy boxes that we make for it or to forget that everything else we do in our lives should be done in light of the fact that God was made flesh
- So we can think of Jesus as we might expect him to be: as a perpetual adult, certainly – always imagining him as the fully grown human who walked around the Galilee region and gave the Sermon on the Mount, dispensing teaching so familiar to us now that it seems second nature
- It's possible to forget that the infant Christ who came was so very different than was expected at the time, and if we're honest, so very different than we would expect now, today
- We can think, in other words, about God walking the earth – it isn't necessarily hard for us to imagine
- But what is really hard to imagine is God being unable to walk – unable to do anything for himself, being radically dependent upon others, upon his family – being vulnerable
- Being everything that it means to be human
- That's something pretty radical, pretty unexpected
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- You've probably heard that Disney has launched its own streaming service called Disney+
- And you can probably guess, knowing what big Disney fans Loren and I are, that our family has had a subscription since day one – okay, let's be honest, we pre-ordered our subscription
- And this streaming service of all Disney content has led to something of a Disney renaissance in my household
- Watching some movies and shows we've never seen, some that we haven't seen in ages, and even some that we've seen recently, but have still taken the opportunity to rewatch for no other reason than because it's there
- And this ongoing festival of Disney at my house has included one of my favorite Advent movies: Ratatouille
- I can see some of you thinking, "Wait, that was about Advent? I thought it was about a rat."
- No one else seems to agree with me that Ratatouille is an Advent movie
- But in that movie, one of the main characters in the background turns out to be

something of a John the Baptist figure

- I mean the chef by the name of Gusteau whose story comprises the prologue of the film, and who is known for, among other things, his catchphrase: “Anyone can cook”
- Now the plot of the film is about a rat who turns out to be quite a talented chef, so you can see how this motto would be relevant
- But in the course of it, the sometime villain comes to realize and appreciate what Gusteau really meant – not that absolutely anyone can become a famous and talented chef, but that a talented chef can come from anywhere
- Even, it turns out, a rat
- And even now, you might still be asking yourself, “Wait, how is that an Advent movie?”
- The prophets were speaking to people who had a very clear idea of who the Messiah was going to be
- People who weren’t looking for the Messiah as a baby, in a manger
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- The message of Ratatouille is the message of the prophets, the message of the Incarnation of God that we are meant to prepare the way for
- Not that anyone can be the savior of the world
- But the savior of the world could be anyone – even, and perhaps especially, someone totally unexpected
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- Preparing the way of the Lord means looking for God anywhere and everywhere
- In every moment of our lives, in everything we do, and in every person we encounter