

# John the Baptist

*... a 'signpost' pointing people to Jesus*

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*A reflection given on the Third Sunday of Advent, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021 – the final day of the Christmas Tree Festival – by the Associate Vicar the Revd Wendy Wale, and the Youth Minister Ben Merrell, in Beverley Minster*

*Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18*

## **Wendy**

So on this third Sunday of Advent we remember John the Baptist, best known probably for eating locusts and honey and wearing camel hair clothing. [And Ben, you'll be pleased to know that's not what we're going to focus on this year.]

## **Ben**

[I think James is even more glad of that. No more locusts]

## **Wendy**

[We have had years of locust eating. There may be another one.] But more importantly, John was Jesus's cousin and he played an important part in preparing people for his work and Ministry.

## **Ben**

[Don't drop the prop]. We could describe John as a signpost pointing people to Jesus, *"Look, look at this very special man and listen to what he has to say."*

## **Wendy**

John was a religious leader who people followed, listened to, and were baptised by him in the River Jordan. He taught people about acting justly and not hurting others. People thought *he* might be the Messiah, the one promised from God. But he told them, *"I'm not even worthy to untie the sandals of the one who is to come. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* People heard John's words as good news and they were expectantly waiting for Jesus.

## **Ben**

Today is the last day of our very special Christmas Tree Festival here at the Minster. We've been welcoming people in over the past ten days to see our 100 trees. Each of our trees are also a bit of a signpost telling us something about the people who decorated them, about their messages of hope and good news.

**Wendy**

There are lots of trees that have been decorated by children, through their nursery, or their school, their youth group, or the Children's Centre. There are handprints and footprints and photos and decorations, all reminding us of the wonder and joy of children, especially at Christmas.

*We pray for the world they will inherit;  
the hopes and dreams they will pursue;  
and their vulnerability and safety.*

**Ben**

There are trees that recognise the fragility of life as we remember babies that were never born or died at birth. There are trees that enable us to write the names of loved ones who we will particularly miss at this time.

*We pray for God's comfort and peace  
to surround all those who mourn.*

**Wendy**

There are trees that recognise the work of local charities: the Food Bank and the Cherry Tree Centre; those who support people with motor neuron disease; with macular degeneration; or with life-limiting conditions.

*These trees point to the countless individuals  
who give their time, talent and money  
to bring light and hope into the lives of others  
and to try and make the world a fairer place.*

**Ben**

There are trees that celebrate local businesses keeping us in food and drink, houses and financial services, beauty and health, buildings and home decorations.

**Wendy**

And then there are the trees sponsored by the Minster organisations and daughter churches celebrating the light, life and hope that we seek to shine both within and beyond these walls?

**Ben**

John the Baptist was a signpost pointing people to Jesus who brought good news and a message of everlasting love and hope to the world.

**Wendy**

Our Christmas trees are signposts pointing people to light and hope in the world, reminding us of the everlasting love of God in their evergreen leaves.

*We hope they have helped many to rejoice,  
as we heard in our first reading.*

**Ben**

Jesus invites *us* to be signposts, pointing to his love and hope, to his message of justice and peace. I have a question for us all to ponder this morning and through the rest of Advent, and it's one that I'm asking myself as well:

*What are you pointing to?  
If your life is a signpost,  
which direction is the arrow pointing?*

**Wendy**

Do you seek to help people to find joy and hope and peace? Do you point to Jesus, not in a cringey, awkward way, but like the Christmas trees, in a way that:

*people are drawn to,  
inspired by,  
and feel different for having had the encounter?*

**Ben**

Perhaps you feel *you* need some joy, hope and peace this Christmas: Jesus invites you to share his meal and receive his Spirit afresh this morning.

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice.  
Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."*

## Reading Texts

### Philippians 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

### Luke 3:7-18

<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin 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. <sup>9</sup> Even now the ax 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." <sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" <sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." <sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." <sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.