

Opening Prayer

God of the wilderness,
You meet us where we are—
in quiet, chaos, longing, and hope.
Prepare our hearts
to hear your voice
and to welcome your coming.
Amen.

Reading the Scripture Twice

First Reading: Matthew 3:1–12

Listen for a word, phrase, or image that stands out.

Short silence.

Second Reading

Listen again for what God might be saying to you or to your community.

Scaffolding for Learning

A. The Wilderness as Sacred Space

John appears in the wilderness- the place where Israel learned trust and dependence. In Scripture, wilderness is often both a physical landscape and a human experience: uncertainty, transition, and disorientation. Liberal theology sees the wilderness as a place where the noise of life drops away and we can hear God more clearly. Sam Wells says: “God comes to the wilderness precisely because it is wilderness.”

Where in your own life do you recognise a “wilderness place” where God might be trying to speak?

B. Repentance as Reorientation, Not Fear

Repentance (metanoia) means to change direction, to reorient ourselves, to wake up. It is not guilt-driven or fear-based. It is about letting go of habits that shrink the heart and turning toward God’s future. Richard Rohr describes repentance as the expansion of consciousness—a larger mind and larger heart.

What one small shift in direction might help you turn more fully toward God’s future?

C. Preparing the Way as Social Repair

When Isaiah speaks of making straight the path, he is talking about justice. Preparing the way of the Lord means lowering mountains of privilege, raising valleys of exclusion, and smoothing rough places of violence or prejudice. Advent becomes a season of social imagination: God is coming—make the world ready.

What rough or uneven places in your community need smoothing so others can flourish?

D. Critique of Religious Entitlement

John warns the religious leaders not to rely on pedigree or tradition. Having Abraham as an ancestor is not enough. Faith is seen in fruit-compassion, humility, justice. Sam Wells might say: God desires people who know how to be with God, not people who are eager to prove their status.

What might it look like to show the “fruit” of faith rather than relying on labels, identity, or status?

E. Fire as Transformation, Not Punishment

Fire in this passage is not about destruction. It is about purification, courage, and passion. It burns away what no longer serves life. In liberal and mystical traditions, divine fire cleanses the heart and removes injustice. Wheat represents what is life-giving; chaff represents fear, rigidity, or harmful patterns.

What no longer serves life in you—what “chaff”—might God be inviting you to release this Advent?

Wonderings

- I wonder what kind of wilderness you recognise in this story or in your own life.
- I wonder what repentance looks like if it is more about reorientation than guilt.
- I wonder what “preparing the way” might mean in our community today.
- I wonder what needs to be released- what inner chaff needs to fall away.
- I wonder how we might become people who recognise God’s nearness in small, unexpected ways.

Earthed Examples and Sharing

Invite participants to reflect:

- Where do you see wilderness experiences in your community, school, workplace, or home?
- What habits or assumptions do we need to let go of this Advent?
- What signs of hope or justice do you see—however small?
- Who today reminds you of John the Baptist—who tells the truth or calls us to attention?

Encourage stories from ordinary life: something seen on a bus, in a classroom, in a shop, or in a family.

Group Response

Invite each person to choose a small Advent practice for the coming week:

- listening more deeply,
- an act of justice or kindness,
- a moment of daily silence,
- reaching out to someone in their own wilderness,
- letting go of one habit or fear.

These can be written on paper stones, stars, leaves, or placed in a shared bowl.

Closing Prayer

God of wilderness and awakening,
Prepare our hearts
as you prepare your world.
Burn away what harms,
Strengthen what is good,
And help us welcome
the One who comes
With justice, mercy, and
transforming love.
Amen.

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HeartBeat

Wilderness, Wakefulness, and the Nearness of God

Sunday 30th of November

Lectionary Reading:
Matthew 3:1-12

Welcome

This reading takes us into the wilderness with John the Baptist. Advent begins not in comfort but in the honest places of life. The wilderness is more than geography; it is a place of clarity, awakening, and invitation.

Ice breaker “Wilderness Moments”

Invite people to share in pairs or small groups:

- When have you experienced a “wilderness moment”—a time when life felt uncertain or stripped back?
- What helped you get through it?



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