



Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish

Advent Retreat - Week Two

Guided Reflection on the Gospel of Matthew (3:1-17)

From Bob Rice's *Prepare the Way* in the Formed.org Advent series

(video and full study guide available through [Formed.org](https://www.formed.org))

This reflection recovers the true meaning of Advent preparation and the mystery of Christmas from the commercialization and secularization of the holidays.

An example is an American Broadcasting Company airing the 50th anniversary of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. The President of the United States and the First Lady delivered their accompanying message about Christmas, that 'tiny trees need a little love, and on this holiday we celebrate peace on earth and good will to all.'

Actually, Linus told Charlie Brown what Christmas was really about:

"In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill among people!' ([Luke 2:8-14](#)).

"When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: 'He must increase, but I must decrease'" ([Catechism of the Catholic Church # 524](#)).

We read this in the Gospel of Matthew (3:1-17):

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 baptized 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 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. "I baptize 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 baptize 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."

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

After praying with this Scripture:

- ✦ How does what John the Baptist said then, apply to us today?
- ✦ How does this passage help us focus our attention during Advent?
- ✦ In what ways is the observation of Advent a remedy to the secularization and commercialization of Christmas? Does it help us to regain a sense of the mystery of Christmas?