

An Advent Figure

He is not your usual religious leader, this John the Baptist. He is at home where nobody lives, in the raw terrain of the wilderness. It is a wilderness of hard rock; it gives very little, the sheep have to be archaeologists to find food. John the Baptist looks and sounds wild, like the landscape. He dresses in animal skins, held in place with a leather belt, and eats locusts and wild honey.

He looks like an early punk, this wild man, yet he attracts legions of people to hear him. They are not bothered by his wardrobe or diet; they believe he speaks the word of God. That is why they go out into the wilderness.

He waits and prepares for the one who will come after him – the one who will baptise with the Spirit. Where did John come from? None of us start an adult; we all come from particular place – a particular family.

When John emerges as an adult prophet he is not a man who invented himself. He is a product of two particular parents, a particular home and a particular love.

Like all childhoods, John's is measured by the person he becomes in later life – a wild independent man who can dominate the desert and magnetise people to listen to his message. He is ferociously independent: he can openly confront religious leaders, dismissing them as a brood of vipers. But, he has the charismatic personality to attract outsiders, the fringe people, mercenary soldiers, prostitutes and tax collectors.

He has the unique characteristic of being the only single religious leader to attract Jesus of Nazareth. While Jesus is with John, he changes his life and makes the decision to follow John in the life of a wandering prophet.

Along with the Prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist is perhaps the greatest Advent figure who waits and prepares for the coming of the one who will make all the difference in peoples' lives.

John the Baptist is the patron saint of all who wait on the Lord. What God does in us while we wait is as important as what we wait for.

For John and us, waiting is not just passing time, but becoming what God wants us to be. That is why we wait in Advent.