



Preparing the Way: A Baptism in Advent

9:30 am Sunday, December 7, 2025 || Advent IIA || Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12 || St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA 02339 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

What a joy it is to be together on this chilly, beautifully frosted and blessed morning. Gathered to continue our Advent rhythm of embracing quiet and waiting in expectant preparation for the coming of Christ. AND this morning we will also joyfully continue a family tradition as we baptize our newest member, sweet Jaime Colin Staples, and welcome him into the household of God.

If you are struck by the sweetness and beauty that reverberates across this sanctuary and perhaps find it even brighter, or obvious this morning, I wonder whether it is because the joy, music, talent and curiosity of our neighbors and friends who joined us for the Four Corners Winter Festival is still echoing throughout our space.

Friday night was extraordinary, and thank you to all who made St. Andrew's a sought-out spot on the wonderful map of activities, games and marvelous food!

Just as we were blessed with visitors and guests on Friday, thank you to Jaime's relatives and loved one's, friends and visitors who are joining us this morning, in person or on-line. Your presence on this blessed second Sunday of Advent is a gift, *Particularly* when we have such wonderful things to do together this morning! Thank you for bringing your love, enthusiasm, and hope into this sanctuary today.

Advent is a season of anticipation and quiet, a season when the church whispers rather than shouts, when we lean in to hear lessons and we include intentional moments of silence, rather than rushing ahead. It is the season

where we practice holy attentiveness—waiting, watching, wondering where God might be stirring or breaking through the crust of our winter lives.

And into this morning's gentle Advent stillness comes... John the Baptist. The complete opposite of quietness or subtlety. We're offered no waiting or wondering by John the Baptist. We are offered the unmistakable oddity of his scratchy clothes and weird diet, AND his booming voice crying out in the wilderness: *Prepare the way of the Lord!* He is literally, yelling at us in scripture through history to get rid of anything that dulls our spiritual senses or anesthetizes us from the expectations of God and our shared lives in Christ, because those distractions will keep us from seeing the new thing that God is doing.

John is the prophet who loudly requires that we shake off complacency or any distraction that prevents us from noticing God's works. While the Pharisees and Sadducees are in the direct line of John's ire – sounding both judgy and harsh he yells "*You brood of vipers!*"— and while that might not seem kind, contextually we know that John is consistent in his tone of pastoral urgency.

John is trying to warn religious authorities and scholars that they've gotten it all wrong. Neither their education nor social status or reputations are sufficient to ensure their place of honor in God's kingdom. The Sadducees and Pharisees are missing the most important point of what God requires. Jesus' ministry is not about conforming to the existing scholarly texts or social customs. It is about transformation! John offers his contemporaries and each of us this morning the shouting imperative that God wants your actions to align with the love he has for each of us. With that love, we are expected to be brave enough to repent, courageous enough to act in the world, and generous enough to share God's love by word and deed.

What a perfect reminder for each of us this morning. We get to participate in the sacrament of our church that is all about transformation. We get to baptize and welcome sweet one-year-old Jaime into the household of God. Together, we will make promises about how we will live, how we will recognize the God-given dignity of every human being, and how, as a community we will uphold this child and his remarkable family and loved ones in these challenging promises.

Last week I invited us to find some quiet, undistracted, (hopefully) cell-phone free moments when we might invite God to break through the daily static of our busy-ness. This Sunday, as our second Sunday of Advent practice, I invite each of us to pause- right here during this service – to consider the sacred, historic and miraculous grace-filled sacrament that is baptism. God is moving and doing something new in Jaime’s life and we must not be a brood of vipers and miss it!

With his family’s love and connection and the promises that we will be making and renewing, we are going to create a bond that is insoluble. It cannot be broken. It is the same bond that was made when we were baptized, when his Dad Colin was baptized in this very sanctuary. This joyful sacrament offers moments of connectedness and awe as we affirm Jaime’s belovedness. Right here, right now in this historic sanctuary, baptism is Jaime being known, loved, and called by name by God. Not hypothetically. Not someday. This morning. Right now. God is claiming him as beloved.

This morning the St. Andrew’s community affirms that no matter what happens in Jaimie’s life or the lives of his parents, grandparents, God parents or others, he will always have a spiritual foundation in God and in this community and we will support him. We will pray for him and love him. We will be on his side, always. Whether he grows into a child who asks big questions, or one who loves music, or sports, or books, or justice, or solitude, or leading, or following, or exploring—he will have a place here. He will belong here.

One of the gifts of this community is that we hold a wide range of lived experiences in these pews. We have stories of unimaginable heartbreak and soaring joy. We have spiritual hunger and deep gratitude. We have moments when we dragged ourselves here, moments when we danced through these doors, to get to church, to see each other and to meet God.

All of that wisdom, all of that tenderness, all of that faith and experience is offered—generously—to those who worship here. This is part of what Jaime inherits today.

In a world that is both beautiful and difficult, complicated and connected we are affirming and welcoming Jaime in to his life in Christ where God’s love,

God's presence and God's comfort is unchangeable. As he grows and he changes, St. Andrews will walk with him and his family.

We will make baptismal promises on Jaime's behalf. Promises to resist evil. To proclaim good news. To serve Christ in all persons. To strive for justice and peace. Promises that can sound big and abstract, but in practice, they are incredibly concrete. We live them out one hour at a time, sometimes one MINUTE at a time, whenever we choose compassion over indifference, hope over despair, forgiveness over resentment, generosity over fear.

That is what John the Baptist is yelling about. That is the life to which we are called.

Lift your head, John says. Pay attention. God is near. Prepare the way—because new life is coming. This morning, with the blessed baptism ahead, we get to embody that truth that God is here and Jaime is his beloved.

This is the beautiful promise of baptism. This is the gift of the sacrament. This is the bond we are about to create—joyfully, gratefully, and forever.

So on this Advent morning, as we listen for God in the quiet and heed John's call in the wilderness, let us recognize the holy moment before us. Let us prepare the way in our hearts for the new thing God is doing. And let us surround Jaime, his parents, and his godparents with love that is steady, strong, and reflective of God's own tender delight.

Thank you for entrusting us with Jaime's baptism, and with the spiritual life of your family. We are excited to welcome him and watch him grow. What a privilege, joy and a blessing that will continue to echo across this sanctuary forever. Let's get to it, shall we? Amen+