

John Was On Fire!

This Week's Readings at Mass

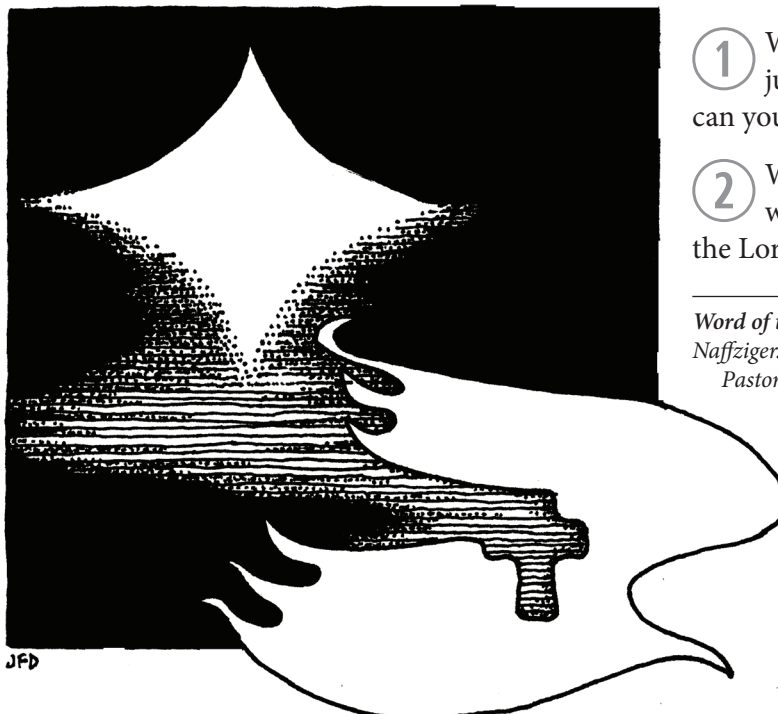
- Isaiah 11:1-10 • The rule of Emmanuel
- Romans 15:4-9 • Prayer of encouragement
- Matthew 3:1-12 • John the Baptist

After hearing the beautiful images of the lion and the lamb, the cow and the bear, and the child and the snake living together in peace in the first reading today, the Gospel passage about John the Baptist may seem jarring, or even off-putting. Then again, the words and actions of John the Baptist, whenever he shows up in the Gospels, are always strong, direct, and challenging. Sometimes people don't want to hear his directness—or his challenges.

John was *on fire* with the urgency that we turn our lives around. He was asking folks to repent of whatever in their lives was keeping them from living in God's way of justice and peace. He gladly baptized those who acknowledged their sins, but he had little patience for false repentance, especially coming from religious leaders like the Pharisees and Sadducees. It didn't matter to him who someone was, what family they came from, or what their religious background was—he wanted to see the fruits of their repentance.

John was a New Testament version of the Old Testament prophets: fiery, passionate characters who unsettled the rich and powerful but offered hope and consolation to those willing to be honest about their shortcomings.

As we prepare ourselves for Christmas, John is a valuable guide. His ur-



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“He shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted.”

Sheepish Question:

How can I enhance my feelings of compassion with a deeper sense of justice?

gency to evaluate how we live in this world and how we need to change is hard to ignore. We have work to do before Christmas that doesn't involve planning the perfect party or finding the perfect gift. Our work now is to acknowledge what we need to change, ask forgiveness, and get back to doing God's work.

Questions of the Week

- 1 Who in your life is on fire for justice and repentance? What can you learn from them?
- 2 What can you do this coming week to “prepare the way of the Lord”?

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