John the Baptist

Today's Gospel (Matthew 3) introduces John the Baptist like this: "… *he 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 baptised 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!*''

Not the sort of guy you'd invite to a party! But John was raised as a *Nazarite.* Nazarites were men and women who vowed to serve God. Whilst on their mission, they had to abstain from, for example, drinking wine or other fermented drinks, and from cutting their hair (males had to remain unshaven), until their mission was complete.

John's mission was predicted by Isaiah in Old Testament times - centuries before; "***This is a voice of a man who calls out in the desert: 'Prepare the way for the Lord. Make the road straight for him'.*** We now know that this prophecy was fulfilled when John baptised Jesus, which enabled the true Messiah to start His ministry…

There were many people of the times who proclaimed John to be the Messiah, and his followers existed well into the 2nd century AD. In modern times, the Mandaeans (an ancient religious group) still revere John as their greatest and final prophet, and look on Jesus as a deceiver.

Though for the Week: In the Anglican communion , we celebrate John as the man who faithfully prepared the way for Jesus to take over. And in the Roman tradition, apart from Jesus and the Virgin Mary, John is the **only saint** whose birth and death are commemorated. That's how important he was, and still is, to our own Christian journey.

Advent ‘prepares-us-to-prepare’… not just to celebrate the birth of a Saviour, but to fully acknowledge and respond-to our calling to follow wherever He leads

So today (Advent 2) we specifically celebrate John’s sacred mission (as a Nazarite) as:

- a herald proclaiming Jesus’s ministry
- an example to us all of ‘personal mission’.

So we pray:

Almighty God, as we prepare in Advent for the coming of your son to the world, we pray that your kingdom will come. We pray for your Church. We pray that like John the Baptist we and all who confess your name may prepare the way for Jesus in our lands, in our communities, and in our own hearts.