

MAKE WAY for **ADVENT**



Daily Devotions for Teens and Young Adults

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INTRODUCTION

I've always had a fairly specific mental image of John the Baptizer. (You know him, right? Son of old Zechariah and old Elizabeth ... birth announced by the angel Gabriel ... baptized scads of people in the Jordan River ... some sort of a cousin to Jesus ... lost his head [literally] when King Herod lost his head [figuratively]. You can read all about him in Matthew 3,11 and 14; Mark 1; Luke 1 and 3; and John 1 and 3 too—catch up if you need to ... go ahead).


Anyway, I've always had this picture of John in my brain. Not just a picture, really. Sort of full-sensory, 3-D "encounter" type of a thing—smell-o-vision and the whole nine yards. He's skinny and hairy—long unkempt dark brown mane of hair and a huge scraggly beard (think Tom Hanks in "Castaway"). He's wearing a caveman-type getup fashioned out of camel's skin—a really unruly thing harvested from the camel just as it was going through its springtime molt.

If you dare get close to him, two things jump out at you right away: 1) his breath absolutely reeks of recently turned honey, and 2) there's a disembodied locust leg lodged in his beard, just below his mouth.

There's an odd look in his eyes—a look some might mistake for insanity ... but they'd be wrong. It's that look that some people have when they appear to be looking right through you, even though they're looking at you. Except you notice it even when he's not looking at you. It's the look of a person who's spent so much time looking into the future that he doesn't quite seem in the present anymore. It's unnerving.

Sandals? He doesn't even bother wearing them. The soles of his feet have grown so tough and thick after years of walking over the sunbaked rocks of the Judean wilderness that they're more impervious to the dangers of the desert than any mere leather sole can make them.

And, of course, there's "The Voice." His most distinguishing characteristic. It's ravaged and worn from untold years of shouting. "Prepare!" he shouts, "PREPARE!" in a raspy, gravelly, guttural cackle that, amazing, still



has both strength and clarity. Its only modern-day counterpart would be the over-the-top posing of a “Professional Wrestler.” Except in the case of John you get the distinct impression that he absolutely means what he says ... and as a result you absolutely believe every word.

Anyway ... that’s my mental image of John the Baptizer.

Except, not too long ago I read something—something I’d read before, actually, and had heard dozens of times over the years. Only this time I read it differently, and it went bouncing around the inside of my cranium in such a way that my mental image of John flip-flopped in a profound, life-shaking way.

And how did it change, you ask? Here’s how:

Now, in addition to all those other things, he’s wearing a hat.

A big ol’ yellow hat, just like those worn by construction workers.

What could I have read to effect such a profound change in my thinking? This right here:

“I am sending my messenger to get the way ready for you. In the wilderness someone is shouting, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”

A HIGHWAY! Get it!

I mean, I’m not daft or anything. I realize that verse (which is clearly referring to John the Baptizer) is meant to be read FIGURATIVELY. It’s PICTURE language.

But still ... what if we took it LITERALLY? Just for once. Just for Advent. What if we considered what it might mean to build a real highway to prepare for our very real God? What if we really considered John to be a sort of “construction supervisor” on the highway that leads to Bethlehem?

What if, this Advent, we donned some hard hats ourselves and started shouting John’s message along with him: “PREPARE! PREPARE! ROAD WORK AHEAD!”

December 1

ROAD WORK AHEAD: POSITIONS AVAILABLE

So you wanna work on my crew, eh? Ever done this type of work?

No?

That's okay. We train as we go.

How'd you hear about us, by the way? We've been advertisin' for quite a while in print. Those prophets have been workin' overtime—Isaiah ... Micah. They've been puttin' out whole BOOKS. And recently we've launched a huge broadcast campaign, too.

Oh, you heard from John, huh? Yeah, he's been spearheading that broadcast campaign I was talkin' about. And he's pulled in quite a few new workers, I must say. I wasn't so sure about his message at first. I tried to persuade him to go with something like: "Road Work Ahead: Positions Available! The Labor Is Hard But The Benefits Are Heavenly!" He went with ... well, you heard it ... the whole "Prepare A Royal Highway!" bit. I thought it came across a little esoteric, if you catch my meanin'. But hey, I can't argue with his results. I mean, it brought you here, right? And like I said, you're not the only one. People have been comin' from as far away as JERUSALEM to hear ol' John in the desert. He's gettin' the word out, all right.

What's that? You wanna know when the work starts? When the work STARTED is more like it. Let's just say work began on this particular highway further back than you can imagine. Right now we're just workin' on the final push—to Bethlehem.

So anyway, you can start today if you want. I will ask that you put your John Hancock on this little contract. Just a way of making a bit of a commitment, if you catch my drift.

**I am joining this Advent "Road Crew" on December 1.
Lord Jesus, be with me as I prepare for your coming.**

Signed: _____

December 2

POINTING THE WAY

John got the news about the coming of Jesus (what Advent is all about). He pointed people down "The Royal Highway" toward the Lord.

Who pointed YOU toward Jesus? Parents? A pastor? Teacher? Grandparents? A friend? Chances are good that more than one person helped point you down the road that leads to Bethlehem and beyond ... and continues to help point you down that road.

Draw those people in the space below. But don't draw them LITERALLY. Draw them SYMBOLICALLY in a way that somehow represents the way they shared the news of Jesus with you. For example, my father is a pastor. His weekly sermons helped to point me toward the Lord. So I might draw him as a loudspeaker (with glasses and a bald head). My grandma shared Bible stories with me, so I might draw her as a Bible storybook (complete with gray hair and a plate of oatmeal raisin cookies). Who could you draw?

Have you ever pointed toward the Lord?



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John the Baptist called out to all who would listen, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make God's highway straight!"

This faithful and often fun Advent devotional booklet helps you imagine what working on that highway might really look like. Will we literally put on an orange helmet and tear up the streets? Or does preparing the way for the coming Savior involve a little more internal re-construction?

Journaling activities accompany these daily December devotions.