



Figure 1 *Where is the Messiah*

03B ADVENT 3B BIBLE STUDY

Where is the Messiah

Abstract

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing

John 1:26-28

Revised Common Lectionary. (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

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03B Advent 3B Bible Study

Where is the Messiah

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<i>Old Testament</i>	Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b–55
<i>New Testament</i>	1 Thessalonians 5:16–24
<i>Gospel</i>	John 1:1-18 ⁱ

John 1.6-8,19-28

Religious leaders are dispatched to question John the Baptist as to his identity, wondering if he might be the Messiah. John repeatedly answers in the negative but leaves them with an intriguing possibility that the Messiah is among them – but they don't realise it yet.

This week's resources explore: searching for the Messiah only to discover he is among you.

Introduction

In spite of the readings set down I want to look at the early verses of John, rather than the selection given.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Welcome and opening prayer

A gathering prayer

Gathered here today, from our isolated places,
 we are together on this joyful Advent
 to celebrate the light that we light,
 to mark that hope is always present among us,
 even when we do not see it.
 Let us find hope and strength in this company of friends,
 lifting up our voices together in a great song of praise
 to the one who is always with us.

Amen.

Reading

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.ⁱⁱ

Exegesis

The Gospel reading opens with an unequivocal statement about the role John played and states clearly his commission by God, leaving us in no doubt what he was and what he was not. In the remainder of the reading, things are a bit more complicated.

What is the force of the question in verse 19, 'Who are you?' It seems clear that these religious leaders are asking about more than John's ancestry and genealogy. John's answer to their question is in the negative, 'I am not...' (v.20). In fact, he is asked variations on the question three times and three times he responds in the negative. John obviously discerns a subtext to their first question. It is tempting to ascribe negative purposes to the religious leaders here, but just for a moment imagine that they have come with curiosity that finally, in their day, the Messiah might have appeared. From such a perspective, there may be sadness in John's confession that he is not who they are looking for. There is a challenge here for contemporary readers of this text to examine what exactly it is we are looking for when we look for Jesus, and what we do when the reality disappoints us.

When the leaders ask a fourth time and demand an answer from John (v.22), growing increasingly desperate and not wanting to return to the others with a negative answer, John finally gives a positive statement as to his identity. He leaves them with an intriguing and cryptic answer, 'Among you stands one whom you do not know' (v.26). Again, it is not clear whether this answer is shutting down a line of questioning or opening one up. The information they (and we) have gleaned from John amounts to this: 'I am not the One...he is to come...and he is already among you, but you don't know him.' This is entirely consistent with Jewish tradition that the Messiah could be anyone, therefore be careful. It could be the person standing beside you; so treat that person as if he or she were the Messiah.

When this passage is finished, we are left with only one unambiguous piece of information: that this took place in Bethany.

Picture pointers: 'Can you find the Messiah?'

- Can you find the Messiah?
- What would you ask the Messiah if you did find him?
- If the Messiah could be anyone among us, how should we respond?



Live your faith

Every day, make a conscious effort to consider: Where do you see Jesus among us today (especially, in places or people where you might not expect to see him)? Recall the words of Isaiah 61.1 (have them written on a small card) – what is God calling you to do today?

A sending out prayer

Gathered in, Lord, we have been nurtured by your Spirit of Life.

Now, sent out, we go in the assurance that your Word lasts for ever, and your promises are true.

Let the lowly be lifted up.

Let the hungry be fed.

Let the mighty listen:

God, who is merciful, hears all.

Come, let us go in the blessed joy of God's kindness.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

ⁱ Revised Common Lectionary. (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

ⁱⁱ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jn 1:1–18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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ⁱⁱ Lumo Gospel of John <https://youtu.be/G2qjPDtQnk4?list=PLcJVluhI8isK1RYcLxY0L929cnN3vAlI8>
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