

# Advent 2A

## December 4, 2022



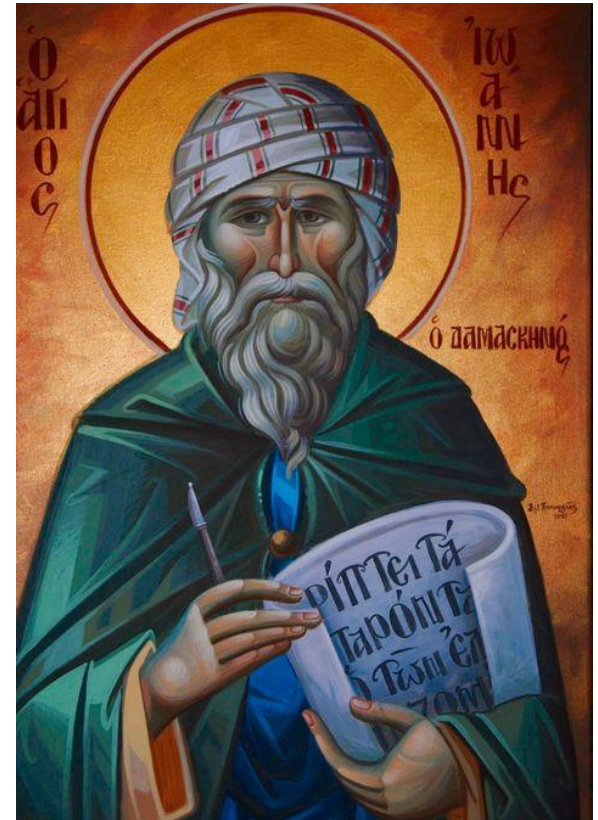
Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 15:4-13

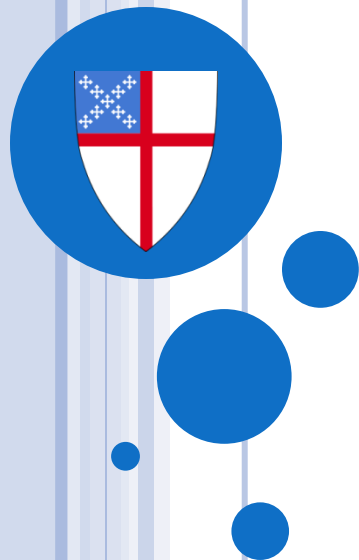
Matthew 3:1-12

# John of Damascus

c. 675-749

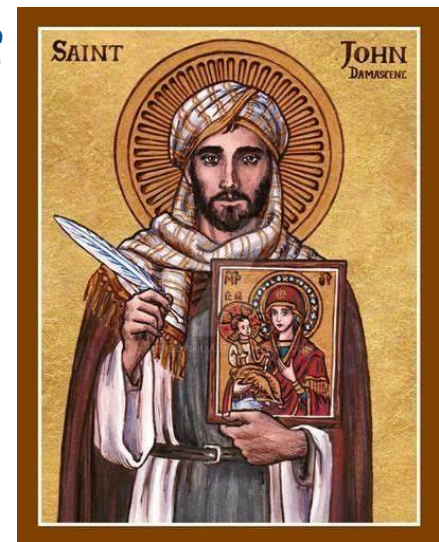


## Hymn Writer & Icon Advocate



John is considered "the last of the early Church Fathers". He was the son of a Christian official at the court of the Muslim Khalifa Abdul Malik in Damascus, and succeeded to his father's office. It was his father's desire for him to "learn not only the books of the Muslims, but those of the Greeks." It is likely that John grew up bilingual. Other sources describe his education in Damascus as having been along the lines of a Hellenic education under the tutelage of a monk named Cosmas, who Arabs had kidnapped in Sicily, and for whom John's father paid a great price. In John's time, a dispute among Christians raged between Iconoclasts (image-breakers) & Iconodules (image-venerators or image-respectors). Although Emperor Leo III vigorously upheld the Iconoclast position, John wrote in favor of the Iconodules with great effectiveness. Ironically, he was able to do this chiefly because he had the protection of the Muslim Khalifa (ironic, since Muslims eschew the use of pictures or images in places of worship). John is also known as a hymn-writer. Two of his hymns are sung in English at Easter: "Come ye faithful, raise the strain" and "The Day of Resurrection! Earth, tell it out abroad!" Many more are included in Eastern Orthodox Church hymns. His major writing is *The Fount of Knowledge*, of which the 3<sup>rd</sup> part, *The Orthodox Faith*, espoused Christian doctrine as the Greek Fathers viewed it. The dispute about icons was not a dispute between East and West as such. Both Greek and Latin churches accepted the final decision. Iconoclasts argued that religious images violated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment ban on worshiping graven images. Iconodules replied that Christ's coming radically changed things, arguing the law must be understood in a new light, just as the commandment to "Remember the Sabbath" had to be reconsidered after Jesus' Resurrection on the first day of the week. Before the Incarnation, it had indeed been improper to portray the invisible God in visible form; but God, by taking fleshly form in the person of Jesus Christ, had blessed the whole realm of matter and made it a fit instrument for manifesting the Divine Splendor. He had reclaimed everything in heaven and earth for His service, and had made water and oil, bread and wine, means of conveying His grace to men.

## John of Damascus



## Collect for Advent 2A

*Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

The image shows a desert landscape at night. In the foreground, two figures are silhouetted against a dark sky. One figure is on the left, and another is on the right, holding a staff. In the background, there are more silhouettes of figures and a bright star in the sky. The text 'Second Week of Advent' is written in a cursive font on the right side of the image.

*Second Week of  
Advent*

A voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'

(Mt 3:3)

## Prayer for Advent 2A [John of Damascus]

*Confirm our minds, O Lord, in the mysteries of the true faith, set forth with power by your servant John of Damascus; that we, with him, confessing Jesus to be true God and true Man, and singing the praises of the risen Lord, may, by the power of the resurrection, attain to eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for evermore.*

## Better Times Ahead

--"The 'shoot' is a symbol of hope and a clear contrast to the hopelessness of King Ahaz's policies, which nearly destroyed the nation and its Davidic line of rulers (the stump)

--All good Jews hearing Isaiah's words knew Jesse was David's father, would remember the covenant YHWH set up with David, & would know YHWH was faithful to that covenant by bringing life out of the stump of Jesse

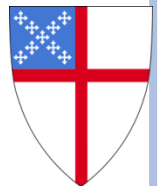
--Spirit of wisdom & understanding will enable Jesse's shoot to deal effectively with practical issues of rule—solving knotty problems that come with power

--Israelites should not fear Assyria but should fear YHWH—a fear suggesting holy awe in YHWH's presence

--Rich & powerful depend on lawyers & politicians to protect them, but the poor & meek are dependent on an impartial judicial system & leaders committed to ruling justly.

--V5: Righteousness & faithfulness are 2 chief characteristics of YHWH & of a good person: We depend on righteous folk to do the right thing—and on a faithful folk to act dependably

--The child metaphor reveals YHWH's power is what counts, not the world's. -  
-This child will accomplish what strong, mature men only dream of doing.



ADVENT 2A: NEW WORLD ORDER [ISAIAH 11:1-10]

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*A shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse & a branch shall grow from his roots. The Lord's spirit shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom & understanding, the spirit of counsel & might, the spirit of knowledge & the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor & decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth & with the breath of his lips he'll kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist & faithfulness the belt around his loins.*



*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf & the lion & the fatling together, & a little child shall lead them. The cow & the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; & the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, & his dwelling shall be glorious.*

St. John's Episcopal Church, Centreville VA

*Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

WELCOME ONE ANOTHER AS  
CHRIST HAS WELCOMED YOU  
ROMANS 15:7

*Welcome one another, just as Christ welcomed you, for God's glory. For I tell you Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth so he might confirm promises given to the patriarchs, & so Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, & sing praises to your name"; again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; and, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, let all the peoples praise him"; and Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy & peace in believing, so you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*St. John's Episcopal Church, Centreville VA*

### Opening Act

--Text reinforces a dominant theme in has dominated Romans since 1:16. i.e., God's righteousness is for Jew & Gentiles alike; God intends the OT to benefit Christians as well as Jews

--Earlier, Paul admonished "strong" Christians to "accept one who is weak in faith" (14:1). Now he calls us all to welcome one another: weak/strong; Jew/Greek; slave/free; male/female

--Our purpose as Christians is to glorify God. We cannot effectively glorify God while fighting among ourselves

--By living in harmony (V5), speaking with one voice (V6), and welcoming one another (V7), we render effective witness—we give God glory.

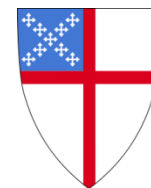
--V9: God's intent from the beginning was/is to save Gentiles

--Vv9-12: cites 4 scriptures to support Paul's argument that Christ became a servant of the circumcised for benefit of circumcised/uncircumcised alike

- 1<sup>st</sup> quotation: David praises God to the Gentiles.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>, Gentiles do the rejoicing.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>, Gentiles & all peoples praise God.
- 4<sup>th</sup>, "the root of Jesse" rises to rule the Gentiles and to give them hope.

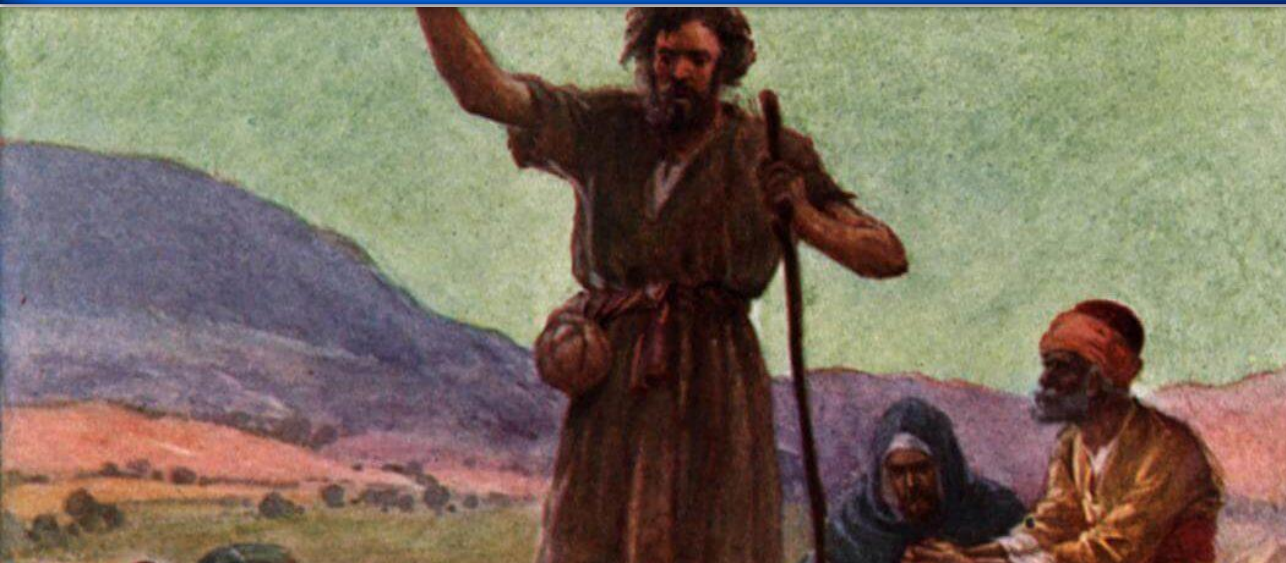
--Net effect of these four verses is to show that the salvation of the Gentiles has been a part of God's plan from the beginning.

ADVENT 2A: INDISCRIMINATE MESSAGING! [ROMANS 15:4-13]



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*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist; his food was locusts & wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem & all Judea were going out to him, & they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*



*When he saw Pharisees & Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down & thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit & fire..."*

*St. John's Episcopal Church, Centreville VA*

### Opening Act

- Malachi, who lived 400 years earlier & was Israel's last prophet (until John the Baptist appeared) prophesied John's appearance
- Ministry begins in the wilderness, in part to escape distractions of the city
- It's also Israel's birthplace & holds a holy place in its history
- Hosea spoke of the wilderness as the place where God speaks tenderly to his people and brings them hope
- John denounces evil where he finds it, including within Herod's family
- He summons people to righteousness. "Wherever the gospel is heard in its depths it is preceded by the law in its seriousness.
- Without law there is no gospel: John is the law of God in person; Jesus is the gospel of God in person
- Repentance involves turning around—a new direction—a change of heart—a new commitment. John calls for people to repent, because only when we face sin squarely and renounce it can we be freed from it
- Today, we are sorely tempted to call sin by other names and to blame other people for our problems rather than accepting responsibility for our sins. Such an attitude denies the reality of sin, and thus offers no escape from it.

ADVENT 2A: PREPARE YE THE WAY! [MATTHEW 3:1-12]



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