



## **Matthew 3:1-2**

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Every king needs a herald to announce his coming, and that’s what the Old Testament prophets had been doing for centuries, prophesying about the coming of Jesus, and today the last and greatest prophet appears to herald the coming of the great king and his king-

dom. John the Baptist comes, the last and greatest prophet, to announce the coming of the last and greatest king, Jesus, who will reign on the throne of David forever.

Our passage starts, 'In those days John the Baptist came' and 'in those days' marks the passing of more than 25 years. The gospel of Luke, in chapter 3, says John the Baptist came in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Luke was a careful historian and so from this we know that the year John came was the year 26 BC which means that both Jesus and John are now about thirty years of age.

We don't know much about Jesus' childhood and teenage years, we only have one story in Luke about Jesus when he was twelve. Matthew's moved from the toddler Jesus, skip-

ping his youth and his twenties, and he picks up the story of Jesus' life when he is thirty. Over these 25 years or so Jesus most likely followed his father's trade, becoming a carpenter, one of the lowliest jobs in the ancient world. Joseph also seems to have died sometime in Jesus' teenage years which would have seen Jesus, as his eldest son, become head of his household. He would have been responsible for the welfare of his mum, Mary, now a widow, and his brothers and sisters. We read in Matthew 13 that Jesus was from a big family with four brothers and at least two sisters.

'In those days John the Baptist came.' A little about John the Baptist. 'The Baptist' isn't a surname or in this representing a Christian denomination, it's what John did, and it's what he became known for. He baptised people. But more of that over the next few days.

Who was John? Well Jesus says of him in Matthew 11 that he's last and greatest prophet, he's Elijah returned, fulfilling a prophecy from Malachi in the Old Testament. Elijah was one of the greatest Old Testament prophets but now the greatest of them all is here, John the Baptist. Remember that prophets were heralds of the king and his kingdom, and John is the greatest of them because he is the last of them, the one who introduces the king to the world, the one who introduces Jesus.

John was an incredible preacher who drew huge crowds from all over the countryside to hear him preach about the coming of Jesus. He pulled no punches, whether he was addressing soldiers, or religious leaders or even King Herod Antipas himself, John's message was fearless, and it was the same for everyone, we see a summary of it in verse 2 of our

passage:

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Repent, which is a Christian word for turn, turn away from your sin and back to God, turn back to God and ask for his forgiveness. John’s basically staying stop ignoring God before it is too late, because God’s king is coming. And so the countryside was afire with the coming of a great prophet, the first prophet in almost 400 years, preaching repentance, the end times are here, the king is coming and you’re not ready, so turn, repent, turn back to God and live in a manner worthy of him because the king is coming and his kingdom is almost here. And just as all good heralds do,

John created a huge stir amongst the people announcing the coming of king Jesus.

And John's message becomes Jesus's message. 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' And this same message became the message of Jesus' disciples which in turn has become the message of all Christians 'repent for the kingdom of heaven is here.' Repent, these are the last days, God's king has arrived, his kingdom is coming, Jesus has inaugurated it, and one day soon it will be fully and finally here. And it will happen on the day when Jesus returns, not to die for our sins this time, but to sit in judgment as king of kings and lord of lords over the sins of all humankind. And on that day, all those who have not accepted Jesus into their hearts as their king and saviour, on that day they will be held to account. John preached a message of repentance. It became

Jesus' message and went on to become central to Christianity, its beginning and its most important element – repent and believe before it's too late.

And so John's message was urgent and passionate but ours must be even more so. At the end of Matthew's gospel Jesus says that before he returns the gospel will go out to all the nations and today, 2,000 years later the gospel has almost gone out to all of the nations. The king is coming again soon and when he does he will come to judge the living and the dead. Time is short. He might come back today and so John's message and Jesus' message and the message of Jesus' disciples must be the message that rings out from us today as well. Their message is our message. 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is here.' Turn, turn back to God before it's too late. Ev-

ery king needs a good herald, the more the better, and God has appointed us to be heralds of the coming king.

So why not take a moment now to think about how we follow John the Baptist in heralding the coming of Jesus. Think about our role in calling people everywhere to repentance and faith in his name. What a privilege and what a burden. Do you feel it? Being the bearer of the words of eternal life? With everything hanging on the response. Also, think of John's message of repentance. Perhaps it cuts a little close to the bone. How's your prayer life going? Are you confessing your sins regularly to Jesus? Are you truly repentant before him? It's not always easy, sometimes we like to hold on to certain sins. Repent. It was at the heart of John's preaching, and at the heart of Jesus' preaching, and it is at the heart of Christianity.



Do you have a repentant heart? Are you truly sorry for your sins, all of them? Are you asking God for forgiveness and doing your best to work with the Holy Spirit who lives inside of you to leave the sins that tempt you behind forever? I'm sorry to probe, they're hard questions aren't they? I'm asking them of myself as I ask them of you. Take the time now to think over this passage of Scripture deeply, let God speak to you through it, and then when you're done, why not spend some time confessing your sins to God, and praying that today might be a day that you can take this urgent message of salvation through repentance and faith to the people that God has placed in your life.

Thanks for listening, and I'm very keen to pick up the story of John the Baptist with you again tomorrow.