

A Prophet Pointing to THE Prophet

Intro. Some of us are careful in what we wear and spend time carefully choosing our clothes each day, making sure everything coordinates. For others clothes are not that important: a shirt, pair of pants and shoes, no socks. Wearing a uniform is so much easier. I know enough not to wear stripes with plaids, but I did ask if these two shades of purple vestments were okay. It's not clear whether John the Baptist chose his clothes for a purpose or just wore what was available in the wilderness where he lived.

I. This is the first mention of John in Matthew's gospel. There is no background on who he is. He just suddenly appears out of the wilderness and immediately gets a lot of attention. Not surprisingly given the way he looked. For us a camel hair coat is

very nice; John's was a bit rougher and possibly smellier. He was a man who lived off the land. Artists picture him having a beard and long hair in the style of his time. His physical appearance didn't bother most people when he showed up on the bank of the Jordan River. He looked like a lot of people who lived in the desert. But there was another reason why John's appearance would not have sent people running the other way in fear. He was dressed in the manner of a *prophet*. It is like seeing a nun or a monk on the street; we recognize them as holy people. The Israelites recognized John was a holy man. When he began to speak, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near," it was a familiar word. It echoed their tradition and scripture prophecies about the Messiah. He called for a serious, personal change of heart. Scripture tells us the people were

waiting for the Messiah and many thought this could be him. To avoid people confusing him with the Messiah, John was clear: “the one who comes after me is mightier than I am. I am not worthy to carry his sandals.” He will baptize you not just in river water but in the “Holy Spirit and fire.” What John wore truly identified *what* he was and *who* he was: a prophet and the pre-cursor to the Messiah.

Concl. People wear uniforms for any number of reasons. Many times it is to identify what we **do**, like delivery people, military, peace officers, medical personnel or firefighters. But uniforms do not tell others who we **are**. John the Baptist wore a kind of “uniform” that identified him as a prophet of God. A follower of the Lord doesn’t have to wear a certain uniform to be identified. What identifies disciples today is our *way of living*. A way of living that is

based on the Lord, is clear and obvious to others and often counter cultural, contrary to the rest of the world. This way of living comes through a decision and commitment from our Baptism with water and the fire of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ. The sacraments Confirm that faith and give us Communion with the Lord. The strength we receive feeds our way of living. Each morning, don’t worry about what we are to wear, look in the mirror and recognize the holy person there. **We don’t have to wear camel skin and eat grasshoppers to be identified as the prophets for today. That’s a good thing!**

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