



John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4).

In the wilderness and in the river, on the margins of society, John the Baptizer offered faithful witness to the ongoing work of God. People went beyond the borders of their familiar lives to hear the words of a prophet, to seek renewed faith, to begin new journeys and to be transformed through baptism.

What does it mean to offer faithful witness today? As we ponder this question together as national church leaders, we experience shared challenges, new insights, mutual encouragement, deeper faith and common callings. Our common witness is bound not by ecclesiastical or national borders but by our common baptism. As leaders of four churches on a shared continent, and with shared complicity in the legacies of the Doctrine of Discovery, the enslavement of Black people and the mistreatment of all people of color, we hear the prophets and the Spirit speaking clearly when we listen together.

This Advent, we feel called to name the truth that the sin of racism and white supremacy is ongoing. People continue to be subjected to and oppressed by these systemic evils, even within our own churches and the ecumenical movement.

For the sake of our common mission and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we share a commitment to dismantling racism and combating white supremacy, and we actively seek opportunities to engage more deeply. We bind ourselves together in this work, even as we are bound together by a common history of complicity with evil. We look forward to meeting with members from the Black, Indigenous and other communities of color within and beyond our churches to help us develop specific goals and actions. We know this will not be easy, but it is essential. It happens only by moving beyond the borders of the familiar, encountering the truth, trusting God's grace and being transformed. We have much to learn from and with each other.

The birth of Christ to dwell among us holds the hope for our own rebirth. Our faith is in God's ongoing work that establishes God's kin-dom of equity, equality, justice and liberty for all. Our calling is to prepare the way of the Lord by embracing truth, promoting healing and acting in love.

As you make your Advent preparation this year, what do you need most? Forgiveness, repentance, healing, renewal of baptismal vocation, time in the wilderness or a word from a prophet? We are confident that God will grant us all that we need to be transformed for faithful witness.

Let us pray

God of all, form us into churches beyond borders.
When we feel stuck, amplify the prophet's word.
When we are distracted by privilege, put us in the wilderness.
When we need a new way, dunk us in the river.
When we are wrong, move us down the path of truth-telling and repentance.
When we need healing, sustain us with your love and hope.
When we cannot see beyond ourselves, move us beyond arbitrary borders.
Bless us with the Holy Spirit, that the good news may be for us a beginning.
Amen.

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