

# Forerunner

*Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:1-13; Luke 3:1-6; John 1:19-34*



*Year A Advent 2 ; Year B Advent 2 ; Year B Advent 3 ; Year C Advent 2 ; Year A Epiphany 1 ; Year A Epiphany 2 ; Year B Epiphany 1 ; Year C Advent 3*

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part   ▲ = medium sized part   ● = small part

		1	2	3	4
▲	<b>John the Baptist</b> - more a force of nature than a man; a whirlwind of anger and Purpose	▲		▲	▲
▲	<b>Sadducee</b> - a religious leader who goes out to observe John solely to discredit him or catch him saying something incriminating	●		▲	
▲	<b>Pharisee</b> - a religious leader who goes out to observe John with an open mind	●		■	
▲	<b>Judas</b> - a future disciple of Jesus who's currently the leader of John's disciples; a smart and committed patriot who's a more articulate spokesman for the group than even John at times	●	▲	▲	▲
●	<b>Jesus</b>		●		
▲	<b>Phillip</b> - a very young man who'll be a future disciple of Jesus, but who's currently following John		▲		▲
▲	<b>Andrew</b> - the younger brother of Peter, who'll later become a disciple of Jesus along with Peter, but who is currently following John; a level headed and conscientious young man		▲		▲

## Scene 1

**John , Judas , Pharisee , Sadducee**

*{John the Baptist, along with his disciples (one of which is Judas) is baptizing people in the Jordan river when he spots some religious leaders who have come out to observe him.}*

**John** *[to the crowd]* And so I tell you once again: anyone with two shirts should share with the one who has none! *[seeing the Pharisee and Sadducee]* You! Snakes! Vipers! Did no one warn you to flee from

the wrath to come?

**Sadducee** *[indignantly]* How dare you!

**Pharisee** *[in genuine surprise]* Are you threatening us?

**John** *[to the crowd]* You tax collectors: take only what is due and render an honest account to all! *[to the Pharisee and Sadducee]* I am nothing. I baptize with water for repentance, but One is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire!

**Sadducee** We have nothing to fear from God! We're his chosen people.

**Pharisee** *[still genuinely curious]* Was God who you were talking about? This "one" who's coming?

**John** *[to the crowd]* And you soldiers: serve honorably and don't use your power to extort money from the people! *[to the Sadducee]* You think you will escape judgment because you are Abraham's children? God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones!

*{Some of the crowd don't like the sound of that and begin to murmur.}*

**Sadducee** Blasphemy! You malign our people and our God!

**Judas** *[stepping in]* How so? By attributing to God the power of creation? By acknowledging that we are his people only by his grace? *[to the crowd]* Let us thank God for his mercy! Let us make ourselves fit vessels for the liberation to come!

*{The crowd cheers.}*

**John** *[to the crowd]* Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is near! Already the ax is laid to the roots of the trees, and every barren tree will be cast into the Fire!

**Pharisee** *[an honest question to Judas]* Liberation? The kingdom of heaven? Just who - and what - does your master claim to be?

**Sadducee** *[argumentatively]* It's the Messiah who will deliver us, and none other. Is your master claiming to be the Messiah?

**Judas** Ask him! He's not afraid to speak the truth about anything! *[seeing that they're hesitating]* What's wrong? This is your chance!

**Pharisee** *[summoning his courage]* Very well...

**Sadducee**     *[interrupting his colleague]* No! Not now. *[to Judas]* We'll be back. And we'll get our answers!

*{They exit.}*

## Scene 2

Andrew , Jesus , Judas , Phillip

*{The next day, John is baptizing in the river again when Jesus appears and goes over to Andrew and Phillip.}*

**Jesus**        Is this the line?

**Phillip**      Yes, sir! Thanks for coming out!

**Jesus**        I wouldn't miss this for the world.

**Andrew**     Have you come to be baptized? It's okay if you just want to listen to the sermon.

**Jesus**        I'm here for everything.

*{Judas enters and hears Jesus' last line.}*

**Judas**      *[buoyantly]* Good! Everything - and more - could well happen today.

**Phillip**      *[to Judas]* What do you mean? Does the master have something special planned?

**Judas**      Today could be a day of great revelations. Today could be the start of something big!

**Andrew**     Does this have anything to do with those priests who showed up yesterday? What did they want, anyway?

**Judas**      They wanted to know whether the master was the Messiah!

**Phillip**      That's crazy! Why would they ask that?

**Judas**      Are you telling me *you've* never asked it? In that dark corner of your mind where you think the unthinkable?

**Phillip**      *[after a pause]* I suppose so. But not seriously. I mean, I do wonder sometimes. Some of the things he says...

**Andrew**     *[solemnly]* We've all asked it. We've all wondered. What was his answer?

**Judas** They didn't ask *him*, only me. I think they were afraid of the crowd, but I'm sure they'll be back. They want the answer. They'll eventually ask him the question, and then...

**Phillip** You don't think he'll answer Yes, do you?

**Judas** Like you, I've wondered for a long time where all this was headed, but he said things yesterday that made me sure. He said the Kingdom was at hand. He said a judgment was coming that those priests would do well to flee!

**Andrew** *[to Judas, gesturing to Jesus]* Maybe we'd better discuss this later, in private.

**Judas** *[expansively]* Nonesense! This man came to be baptized. There's no reason why he shouldn't know what he might be getting himself into. *[to Jesus]* How would you feel if our master turned out to be the Messiah?

**Jesus** *[after a pause]* It would please me more than you can know.

**Judas** *[to the others]* See? Here is a true Israeli!

**Phillip** We'd better let him get in line, or he's going to be an unbaptized Israeli.

**Andrew** It's not looking good. The line's even longer than it was this morning!

**Judas** *[to Jesus]* I'll tell you what. We'll move you to the front of the line. I like your attitude.

**Jesus** That's all right. It wouldn't be...fitting for me to take any shortcuts.

**Judas** I like you more and more! All right, if you -  
*{Judas' attention is caught by a distant sight.}*

**Andrew** What is it?

**Phillip** Judas, what's wrong?

**Judas** They've returned already! The moment is at hand!

### Scene 3

John , Judas , Pharisee , Sadducee

*{The Pharisee and Sadducee enter, this time with a contingent of additional priests and Levites.}*

**Pharisee** *[calling out to John in a friendly tone]* Hello!

**John** *[brusquely]* Who disturbs my service to the people?

**Sadducee** *[belligerently]* Their leaders! The ones entrusted with their care! The ones who protect them against false prophets and con artists!

**Pharisee** *[in an urgent whisper to the Sadducee]* Calm down! We want him to answer us honestly, and he won't if he believes he's being railroaded.

**John** *[sarcastically]* What would you ask me for the sake of the people's protection?

**Pharisee** You said some...amazing things yesterday, and we've heard many rumors among the people about who you really are. We've come to find out if you indeed claim to be who they say you are.

**John** Who do they say that I am?

**Sadducee** Some say you're Elijah come back from the dead.

**John** Ha! I am not, and that's well for you, because if I were, I would not be treating with the likes of you! In the great drought that struck the land, your forebearers sought to kill him! And he showed himself only to one poor widow in her hunger.

**Pharisee** Then are you that great prophet Moses said would come?

**John** No, I'm not that prophet, though my coming was foretold as well, and close behind me comes the Kingdom!

**Sadducee** *[outraged but also elated that they're about to provoke a blasphemous admission]* The Kingdom? You claim to be bringing in the Kingdom?

**Pharisee** *[more calmly]* If your appearance among us will bring in the Kingdom, but you're not Elijah or the Prophet, you can only be one other figure...

**Judas** *[to himself with delight]* Here it comes!

**Pharisee** You must be the Messiah!

**Judas** *[to himself]* From their own mouths!

*{A pause.}*

**John** No! I am not.

**Judas** What???

**Sadducee** *[losing his feigned patience]* Then who are you! What are you!

**John** I'm a voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord! Make straight his paths!"

**Judas** *[bitterly disappointed, speaking to himself, but loud enough that everyone else hears him clearly]* What does that even mean? What path can there be but the path to freedom?

**Sadducee** *[unexpectedly pleased that they've been able to harm John after all]* It seems your own follower has lost faith in you.

**John** It's well that he should! For one is coming who is so much greater than me that I'm not worthy to tie his shoes. *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [pointing dramatically into the crowd]* And behold! He stands among us even now!

*{Everyone reflexively turns to look, but there is only the crowd.}*

**Sadducee** Yeah, right!

**Judas** *[incredulously to himself]* He's nuts! I actually thought he might be the Messiah, but he's just nuts.

**Pharisee** *[to his party]* Let's go. We've learned what we came to learn.

**John** *[in a loud voice so the distant crowd can hear]* After this day, I will no longer baptize! Douse yourselves with water while you may! Tomorrow comes the Fire!

*{John exits, laughing maniacally.}*

**Sadducee** *[in malicious delight]* Just another crackpot. *[to Judas]* Oh he might still be arrested some day - they always are, you know; they insult the governor or violate public morals or annoy the Romans a little too much - but it won't be for anything *really* threatening.

*{The Sadducee exits along with the rest of the group, but the Pharisee stays behind for a final word with Judas, who is still reeling from what he's just witnessed from John.}*

**Pharisee** *[gently to Judas]* You believed he was the Messiah.

**Judas**           *[angrily]* What of it!

**Pharisee**       *[continuing in a calm tone]* I wasn't sure myself. But if he had claimed it and been able to prove it to my satisfaction, I would have believed.

**Judas**           *[realizing he's earnest]* Really?

**Pharisee**       Not everybody in the group felt that way obviously, but some did. Most of them were just looking to arrest him for blasphemy or treason, but some of us were hoping for Israel's liberation. *[a pause for Judas to reply, but he doesn't]* What will you do now?

**Judas**           I don't know. Leave him I suppose.

**Pharisee**       Can I make a request of you? For the sake of the nation? If he had claimed to be the Messiah and really been the Messiah, that obviously would have been the best possible outcome. But in a way, what we got wasn't all that bad. It could have been worse. He could have claimed to be the Messiah and *not* really been.

**Judas**           *[glumly]* What harm would that have done besides make bigger fools of us all?

**Pharisee**       Just look at the crowds he's drawing! Look at how fervent they are, how they hang on his words! If he were to declare himself to be the Messiah, they would follow him immediately into a revolt - a revolt that would be crushed. And with it, possibly the entire nation.

**Judas**           I hadn't thought of that.

**Pharisee**       This is the favor I want to ask you: stay with him, at least a while longer. He's denied being the Messiah and says he's going to stop baptizing, so that's good, but if he continues preaching and stirring the people up, there could still be trouble. We need someone close to him to keep an eye on his plans and his moods, to warn us if it looks like he's about to do something destructive. Will you do that?

#### Scene 4

Andrew , John , Judas , Phillip

*{Later that evening, as John is just finishing up, Judas rejoins the other two disciples.}*

**Phillip**       *[watching Jesus walking away after being baptized]* Well, there he goes.

**Andrew** I'm glad he got his turn, especially if...

**Phillip** Do you think it can be true?

*{Judas enters.}*

**Andrew** Judas, what happened? Did he say he was the Messiah?

**Phillip** Is it true what we've heard? That today's the last day for baptisms?

**Judas** *[grimly]* No and Yes.

**Andrew** No he's not the Messiah, or No he didn't say?

**Judas** He said he was not the Messiah. And that today was the last day he'd be baptizing.

**Phillip** Wow.

**Andrew** What are we going to do now?

**Judas** I'm leaving.

**Phillip** Judas, you can't!

**Judas** Why shouldn't I? What's left to do here? It's all come crumbling down.

**Andrew** But he's still a good man, and he does good work. Spiritual work.

**Judas** *[delivering the harsh news]* Today, when faced with pressure from the authorities, he folded - but gave his delusions an out. He refused to risk his own skin leading the nation to freedom, but he claimed that all his talk about the coming of the kingdom was still true. It was just some other guy who was going to do it. And then he claimed that guy was right here today! Of course, there's been no one but the crowd. If I were you, I'd leave, too. Go back to your families before he gets you killed for no reason.

*{An unhappy pause, broken by John running up crying in a loud voice.}*

**John** Behold! Behold! *[pointing frantically to the departing Jesus]* Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world! He it is of whom I spoke! He it is who comes after me! Behold!

**Andrew** What, the man you baptized toward the end of the day?

**John** "Why do *you* come to *me*?" I asked him. "I should be baptized by



*you!*" "Nevertheless," he said, "it is fitting that it should be so." And so I baptized him. And saw the sky open, and the Spirit descend upon him like a dove. And a voice declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." O heavens! O Lord of the Light! Now I may depart in peace. *[running off to some of his other disciples]*  
Behold! Behold!

**Phillip** *[scandalized and embarrassed]* Oh my God, what happened to him? He was always a little high strung, but good grief!

**Andrew** *[more soberly]* Judas, what do you make of this? Is he really nuts, or is there something do this?

**Judas** *[grimly]* I don't know. I'm suddenly not sure of anything again. Did you see the guy getting baptized?

**Phillip** Yeah, we saw it, but nothing unusual happened.

**Andrew** They did talk a while, longer than usual, and I saw the maseter shaking his head through a lot of it. So the part about him not wanting to baptize the guy at first could be true.

**Judas** But afterward. *[drily]* I guess you didn't see the sky open, or hear a voice from heaven!

**Phillip** No, but it seemed like the master saw something. He was kind of dazed afterward. The next guy in line had to tap him on the shoulder to get him going again.

**Judas** *[to Andrew]* Did you see this, too?

**Andrew** No, I was watching the guy walk away. You know, we chatted a bit while he was in the line. He's a carpenter.

**Judas** *[in disbelief]* A carpenter! *[a pause while he thinks, then in a decisive tone]* Listen, I want you to follow that man. Find out where he lives, what his connection to the master is, what he's about.

**Andrew** All right. You can count on us.

**Phillip** Okay, I guess so, for a little while longer, anyway. But what are you going to do? I thought you were leaving.

**Judas** I think I'll stay - for a little while longer. We need to figure this out. Maybe - just maybe - there's still hope!

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