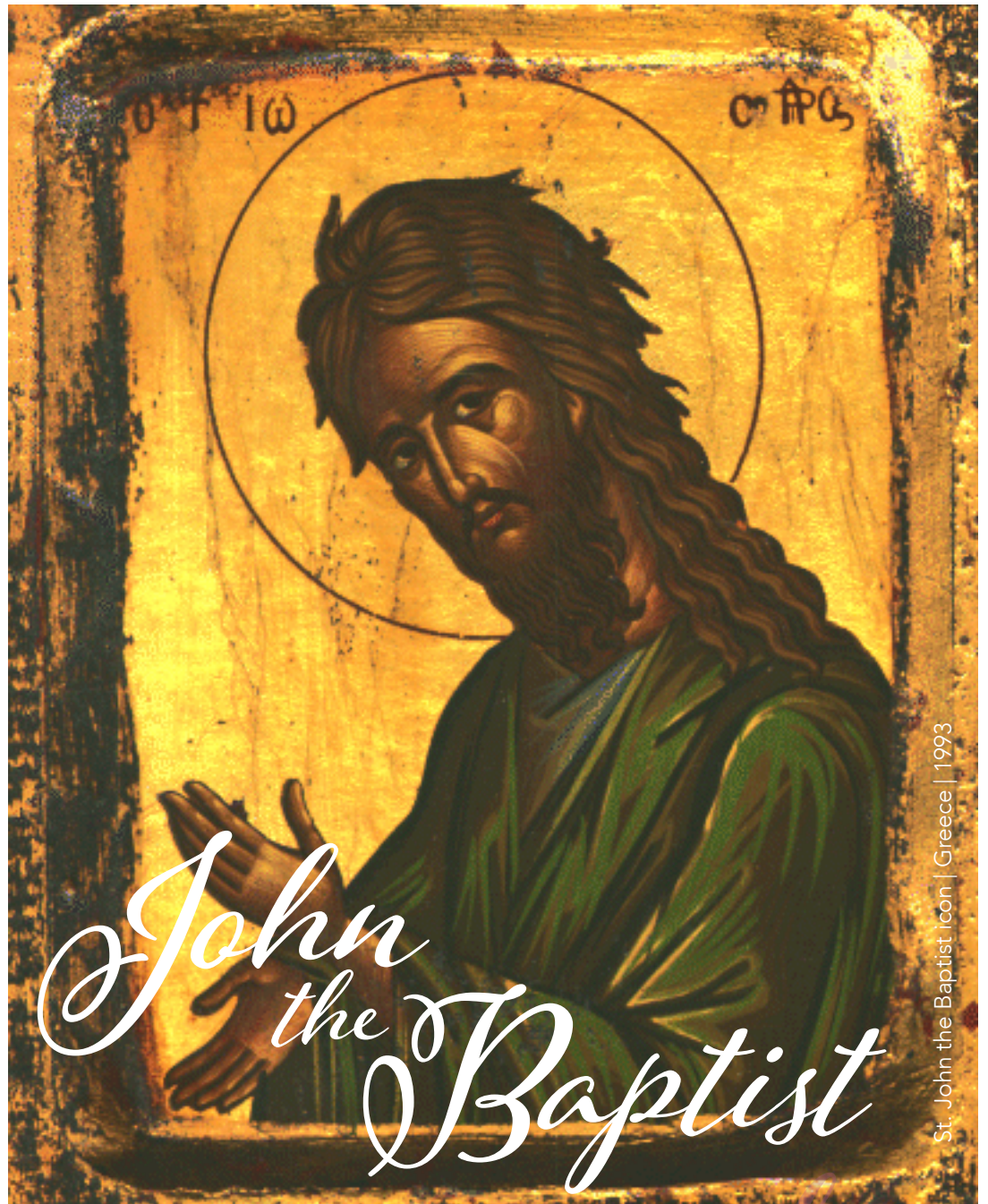


John the Baptist, the slightly older cousin of Jesus, lived much of his life in the deserts of Judea. He dressed and lived like Elijah, the Old Testament prophet, and took his mission from God very seriously.

John the Baptist's mission was to declare that "the kingdom of heaven has come near." What did he mean? For hundreds of years, the Jews had been quietly working to find ways to live that would bring them closer to God. Now, John came telling them that heaven was instead coming closer to them. The God of heaven, in fact, had come down to live with humanity for a time in the life of Jesus.

John's message to repent and be baptized was not a message of cruel judgement, but rather an invitation for people to be cleansed and purified from their sins so they would be ready to meet with and serve God. This baptism was a welcome and joyous solution to being separated from God. As we share the good news of the coming of Jesus with the world this Christmas season, remember that Jesus came to welcome everyone back home to be with him. This message was only a problem for the pompous leaders of the time who thought they were already good



St. John the Baptist icon | Greece | 1993

enough to be with God. Anyone who is willing to come to Jesus, turn from their mistakes, and be cleansed, will find a new life of deep joy and freedom. We, like John the Baptist, are called to tell others about this wonderful invitation.

*Kevin Ware*

*sunday*  
Matthew 3.1-6

**Messiah Jesus, thank you for living here on earth for time to personally invite humanity to come home to you. We have made mistakes and turned away from you in the past. Now, we want to return to you humbly and learn your ways in our lives. Give us courage to be messengers to spread your joyful invitation to all this season. In the powerful name of Jesus, Amen.**

December 20