

December 14, Advent 3A (Matthew 11:2-11)

There is ample evidence that Christ is alive and on the move.

by [Liddy Barlow](#) in the [December 2025](#) issue

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It is rude, some say, to point. But there's no explaining etiquette to a toddler.

Among my daughter's first real words was "dat," always accompanied by an insistent pointing finger. Sometimes she meant "What is that?" and sometimes, "Look at that!" After months of wondering what Pippa could be thinking about, we finally learned what was catching her attention. She pointed to artwork on the wall, to strangers on the bus, to toys in the nursery—gestures that expressed her curiosity and invited our conversational response.

I did my share of pointing, too. On our walks to and from the bus stop, with Pippa in the front carrier on my chest, I would point out interesting things to see: here is a daffodil in bloom; there is a robin; look, a man walking his dog. After I'd point, she'd lift her finger to point to each object in turn.

One day, on our walk home, Pippa suddenly began pointing insistently. I followed her finger and—dat! There was a groundhog on a front lawn, right in the middle of our city neighborhood, a sight I'd never seen before. For the first time, Pippa had shown me something that I had not noticed on my own.

In art, John the Baptist is often depicted literally pointing to Jesus. "Dat!" he seems to declare, as he indicates the one for whom he has prepared the way. Leonardo Da Vinci's John the Baptist, for example, is a smiling sprite in shadows, extending his finger upward, directing your attention outside the painting's frame. John's mission is not to further his own glory but to glorify the one who comes after him. Don't look at me, John says. Look at him instead; turn toward Jesus. I'm only here to point him out to you.

At first, Matthew describes the Baptist as utterly confident in his mission. John begins pointing to Christ before he even meets him. "The one who is coming after me is more powerful than I," he declares, as he directs crowds of people to get ready for the coming kingdom. When Jesus comes down to the Jordan himself, John recognizes him immediately: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

But in this text, after his arrest, John's "dat" takes on an interrogative tone. After a whole ministry of making way for Christ, the gloom of his prison cell finds him unsure he's been pointing in the right direction. "Are you the one who is to come?" John asks, and he sends his disciples to find out.

Jesus receives this question with gentle assurance, taking no offense. (We can hope he hears all doubt-laced questions with this much understanding and grace.) Yet at the same time, he does not offer a straightforward answer. He could have replied, "Hurry back and reassure John that yes, it's me; you pointed correctly, I am the Messiah, the one you've been waiting for." But that's not what Jesus says.

Instead, he asks John, and John's disciples, and all of us wondering how anyone can still be languishing in unjust detention in a world that's already welcomed the Savior, to take a closer look. He invites us to survey the world around us with the curiosity of a toddler and point out interesting things to see: here is a leper healed; there is a dead person raised; look, the poor receiving good news. "Dat!" he invites us to declare, understanding that each

of these sights points beyond itself to the one who made this new wholeness possible.

By inviting John's disciples to trust their own senses and draw their own conclusions, Jesus teaches us all to be pointers. We don't need him to spell out the truth explicitly to be able to read it in the world around us. We can trust what we see, trust what we have known. Even in the dark and chill of December, even in a world where the righteous wind up behind bars and tyrants seem to prosper, there is ample evidence that Christ is alive and on the move. Each one of us can go and tell those stories.

And when our sorrow or confusion or inattention means we fail to see the signs, others can point the way for us. Disciples can become teachers. Little children can lead us. Unexpected voices will call out reason for hope.

Keep watch, this Advent, for those who point. You might, unexpectedly, follow a raised finger and find yourself exclaiming: Dat! The Son of God.