Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

Gospel text (*Mt* 11:11-15): Jesus said to the crowds, "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (...). All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

John the Baptist: the forerunner of God's coming

EDITORIAL TEAM evangeli.net (based on texts by Benedict XVI)
(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today, the figure of John appears deeply rooted in the Old Testament. John the Baptist was a priest, a descendant of Zechariah - priest of the priestly division of Abijah - and Elizabeth – a descendant of the priestly family of Aaron. In John, the priesthood of the Old Covenant leads toward Jesus.

The mission of John is construed on the basis of the figure of Elijah: he is not Elijah, but he comes with the spirit and the strength of the great prophet. With his mission John also meets the expectation of the return of Elijah to purify and relieve the people of God; he would prepare Israel for the coming of the Lord. He is, therefore, included, on the one hand, in the category of the prophets, although, on the other hand, he is simultaneously praised above it because the Elijah who is to come back is the forerunner of the coming of God himself.

—Thus, in these texts the figure of Jesus and his coming are implicitly placed on the same level as God's advent.