

We are all familiar with the biblical prophets of the past. Some might say they were fearful men and were associated with tremendous and powerful events such as thunderstorms, foreign armies and fire.

Even John the Baptist, who brought the prophetic age to a close had a certain tendency to point to what was wrong with people and give them warnings of what would happen if they didn't change. Of course, he was pointing to the coming of the Messiah when everyone was expecting a mighty warrior, in keeping with the prophecies of the past.

Who they got, as we know, was Jesus.

The Gospel reading follows on today from his reading Isaiah in his hometown synagogue. This included events such as the blind being given sight, the lame walking, prisoners being set free and the day of the Lord's favour arriving. Then he announced that he was the one through whom it was all going to happen but, he was simply a carpenter's son. No-one special in this town of Nazara – Nazareth. This angered the people because they thought him to be false.

Hence, in response, Jesus draws attention to those prophets of the past who did things that weren't all that spectacular. Elisha simply told the mighty warrior, Naaman, to jump in the river seven times to cure his leprosy. In one of the land's great famines, Elijah simply stayed with a woman and her son and kept them alive.

It might seem frightening that one of the characteristics of our Baptism is 'prophetic'. We are all called to be prophets. I think that Pope Francis is showing us what this prophetic role looks like. As with Jesus, who came to help people in their need and not point to the bad but, instead, brought in the good, Pope Francis has arrived in Baghdad to encourage peace and support the efforts of all who work for peace. What a wonderful demonstration of a Christian prophet.