

Mark 1: 1-18 “Prepare the way of the Lord”  
How should we also prepare the way?

What do we know about John the Baptist? The gospel of Luke gives us a lot more information about this man for whom our parish is named. John’s parents, Zachariah and Elizabeth, had wanted children but Elizabeth was barren. Just so you know, whenever a woman is barren in the bible, the child she eventually has is destined to be an important biblical character. And that is exactly how it was with John. Luke also tells us that John leaped in his mother’s womb when he heard the voice of Mary who was then pregnant with Jesus.

We also know that John and Jesus were cousins. I wonder if they were close and as children played together. As young men did they talk about the problems of their country and the domination of Rome which they lived under? Did they rigorously discuss scripture passages when they worshiped at Temple?

We also do not know when John became aware that his cousin, this ordinary Jewish man, son of a carpenter, was the long-awaited Prince of Peace? What did Jesus say or do that opened John’s eyes to who He really was? What event occurred between them that this truth become so clear that the purpose of John’s life became to proclaim Jesus’ arrival? I think it would be very appropriate if we asked ourselves, what do **we need** to happen in our own lives to become as excited about Christ’s coming as John?

What I do know is that a lot of us **are not** too excited that December 25<sup>th</sup> is so close. Christmas has always been a time full of expectation as to what was going to be found under the Christmas tree. But there is also the excitement in practicing for the Christmas pageant, decorating the tree and carefully taking out treasured ornaments that have been in the family for years, and mothers cooking those special dishes that are only made during the holidays. Christmas has always been regarded as a season when family and friends share a certain feeling that is unique to this time of year. And let us not forget that on Christmas day the attendance in churches is overwhelming. Most people want to acknowledge that the birth of Jesus Christ is the reason why Christmas is celebrated. But sadly it seems that more and more families are becoming so immersed the **commercial** aspect of Christmas that the real reason for this holiday season is no longer in the forefront of people's minds. I thought it was very sad when I heard that in order to be politically correct certain establishments took the term "Christmas vacation" was replaced it with "winter holiday".

Advent is a time set aside by the Church to help us not lose sight of the meaning behind this season. In today's gospel we heard how John the Baptist could not contain his excitement when he was telling whoever he would meet that the Lord was coming. Their waiting would soon be over and everything that God had promised His people was about to happen. The long awaited Messiah was about to make His presence known.

Now I believe that scripture is the living word of God. By that I mean that we should always try to understand how the gospels apply to us today. It seems to me that this gospel is not only teaching us **about** John the Baptist, this gospel is daring us **to be** like John the Baptist. This gospel passage is challenging **us** to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord. John understood that God was about to do something that would shake the foundations of the earth and he did what he thought was necessary to **prepare** the people for that event. You and I are given the task not to let the world **forget** that event happened. John celebrated the fact that Jesus was present in his day. We need to celebrate and proclaim Jesus is just as present here and now. **And** He is present in everyone we meet.

We have to shift our attention from the gifts we are planning to give, and focus on the gift we have already received. God became man. During this season what we need to contemplate is on is how our belief in God becoming man changes how we live our lives. When was the last time we really stopped and thought about what the birth of Christ really means? Think about it, the creator of the universe, the maker of all that is, seen and unseen, loves us and became one like us. Advent is a time for us not to get so stressed out with superficial things, but to stop and think about what God becoming a man really means. How does that event influence our daily lives?

Advent is a time the Church puts aside in order for us to give special attention the wonder of the incarnation. Jesus came and lived among us. Not only did Jesus become man, He taught us about the Father and the Spirit. He spoke to us about the relationship we are invited to share with our creator; a relationship of forgiveness, of redemption, and of a love that is beyond our understanding. That is the message that the world desperately needs to hear.

We can make known the presence of God by being the kind of people that Our Lord taught us to be. Even though this is a time of much commercialism, this is also a time when you hear stories of great generosity. These acts of kindness are the actions that Our Lord asked us to do when He taught us to love our neighbor. When children or friends see us give some money to a Salvation Army Santa, wrap a gift for the giving tree, give our time and help dole out food at a shelter, we are showing them the true meaning of Christmas. Even though Christmas is one of the happiest times of the year, for some people it is a time of great sadness and loneliness. During this season we must be especially aware of those around us. We are even challenged to look at that over-worked, nasty, sales clerk at Wal-Mart with the eyes of Christ. We are all God's children, not only the ones with the Christmas spirit. When we do act this way we are not only preparing the way of the Lord, we are standing next to The Lord.

Also, Advent should definitely be a time for some quiet contemplation. Why is it so hard for us to take a few minutes every day to light our advent candles and

read a short passage of scripture? Why is it such a bother to come to church for the Wednesday evening meditation? These are the very things that help us focus on the true meaning of Christmas. The word advent also means a beginning. Maybe this advent can be a beginning for us to take our relationship with God more seriously.

Yes – Christmas is coming! When you think about everything that needs to be done in December – decorating, Christmas shopping, party invitations, and family gatherings there is no doubt that Christmas is indeed around the corner. But all of us still have plenty of time before this Advent season comes to an end. Begin today to think and pray not only about how the birth of Christ changed the world, but how does it change your life. Think and pray about what you can do to proclaim God's presence in the world.

Open your hearts and let God revitalize you with His message of love. Advent is a perfect occasion to proclaim the presence of God in our lives and in the world. Advent can be a time for us to: Open eyes to see God, Open ears to hear God, Open hearts to accept God, and Open mouths to tell about God.

Amen