



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Advent
December 6, 2015

How Do You Prepare?

By Janel Esker

The Isaian quote in today's Gospel about preparing the way of the Lord reminds me of what happens in a city when the president or the pope visits. Long-standing potholes are filled. Buildings in disrepair are spruced up and the "riff-raff" (aka homeless people) cleared away. Everything is smoothed out, fluffed up, and brightened to impress. The same happens at our workplaces—the CEO arrives, and desks are instantly clean and the office productive.

John the Baptist was the "voice of one crying out in the desert," challenging people to prepare the way of the Lord.

But this preparation wasn't literally about smoothing roads and filling valleys. It was about repenting and preparing one's heart to welcome the Lord—which is exactly what Advent is about.

"Every valley shall be filled." What are the gaping valleys in our hearts? What do we need to be more full of? Trust? Hope? Generosity?

"Every mountain and hill shall be made low." What do we need less of? Pride? Selfishness? Anger?

"The winding roads shall be made straight." What paths have led us from God?

"The rough ways made smooth...." What personality bumps need smoothing? A judgmental attitude? An intense need for control? The desire to be the center of attention?

We don't prepare our hearts for the Lord out of fear or to make a good impression (as we do for presidents and popes). We prepare them so God can live in us and transform us into the holy people we're called to be. As St. Paul declares, "The one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it..."

Prepare the way, and God will do the rest. †

A Word From Pope Francis



I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its center the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live in the light of the word of the Lord: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (see Lk 6:36). And this especially applies to confessors! So much mercy!

This Holy Year will commence on the next Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will conclude on Sunday, 20 November 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe...in order that it may come to life as a new step on the Church's journey in her mission to bring the Gospel of mercy to each person.

—Homily during penitential celebration, March 13, 2015

Sunday Readings

Baruch 5:1–9

"God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with the mercy and justice that are his."

Philippians 1:4–6, 8–11

"This is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more."

Luke 3:1–6

"John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

PRAYER

Lord, you are always patient with me and do great things for me. Teach me to be more patient in life and grateful for all that has been given to me.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

Advent's Emphasis on Preparation

“Prepare the way of the Lord” (Is 40:3; Lk 3:4) is the cry of John the Baptist, and it is a central theme of Advent. Throughout the season, the “two great preparation themes of Advent emerge and are dramatically pronounced.

The first theme, Advent as preparation for the first coming of Jesus Christ into the world as man, is obvious. Even the casual participant or observer of Christian ritual and practice would recognize the connection between Advent and the feast of Christmas. The second great Advent theme, preparation for the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time, is not so obvious. To experience this emphasis, since there is no obvious connection between Christmas and Christ's Second Coming, it would be necessary to actively join in and participate in the rituals of the season, since this theme is made apparent in the liturgical readings of the season.

However, these two themes are theologically connected and essential for an understanding of salvation history, even though they do not necessarily complement each other in practice nor in the popular imagination. At the same time, both themes do celebrate a central idea that is crucial to the Christian expression of faith and belief: the concept of the “already and the not yet.” We are already saved, Jesus has already



experienced by all of God's people. This dynamic of the “already and the not yet” is clearly at work in the Advent season.

Another way of looking at the dynamic of the “already and not yet” is to see it as liturgical, celebrating the “already” of the season, the historical birth of Jesus, and the ascetical, the “not yet,” which demands vigilance, preparation, penance, and patience.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Rather than scheduling, how might preparation be more like opening access?
- How do you respond to visitors or life transitions?

come, the kingdom has already been established; however, at the same time, we are not yet completely saved. Jesus will come again for a second time, and the kingdom has not yet been perfectly

Advent Action

In a morning meditation, Pope Francis said, “It is the power of money that makes you deviate from authentic faith... The way of God [is] not that of the idolatrous power that money gives you. It is the road of humility in Jesus Christ, who being rich became poor to enrich us with his own poverty.”

We all have gifts that bring with them power, even authority, over others. The next time you're tempted to use your “wealth” to force your will or gain favor from others, stop and consider a more giving and humble solution. Look for ways to offer yourself—not your money or gifts—but God-in-you to that person or situation.

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 7–
December 12

Mon. *St. Ambrose:*
Isaiah 35:1–10 / Luke 5:17–26

Tue. *Immaculate Conception of the Bl. Virgin Mary:* *Genesis 3:9–15, 20 / Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12 / Luke 1:26–38*

Wed. *Advent Weekday:*
Isaiah 40:25–31 / Matthew 11:28–30

Thu. *Advent Weekday:*
Isaiah 41:13–20 / Matthew 11:11–15

Fri. *Advent Weekday:*
Isaiah 48:17–19 / Matthew 11:16–19

Sat. *Our Lady of Guadalupe:*
Zechariah 2:14–17 or Revelation 11:19; 12:1–6, 10 / Luke 1:26–38 or Luke 1:39–47