



“A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all mankind shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:3 - 5) Isaiah intended these words to be words of joy. It was the custom of Isaiah's day to send messengers out into the desert to make preparations for the king's passage. These messengers were to announce that a road needed to be built by filling in valleys and leveling hills. John is **"a voice crying out in the**

desert."

The message of Advent is the same message that we hear throughout the year. Whenever we settle or get stuck on what we consider a right or a privilege, we stop hearing the message. And it is only *the message* that can heal us and transform us.

Here we are with Christmas only weeks away and with all the sentiment, worry and thoughts that come with that, we come to church today and hear about a weird guy living in the desert, wearing clothes made of camel's hair, eating locusts, calling people a bunch of snakes while telling them that fire and brimstone will come down on them. The gospel picture ends with John the Baptist threatening the Sadducees and Pharisees with hell. Aren't you glad you came to church today just before Christmas to hear all of that? John reminds us that it is likely we all need to pay attention to a few things that perhaps we have neglected in our lives, things that revolve around the presence of Christ... or His absence.

Too often we take those around us for granted. We give them little, if any, of our time, our attention, our affection, even our thoughts. It seems strange that we sort of assume that they know we love them without ever actually telling them or showing them that we do love them. Daily routines, concerns about our work, our habits, all can cause us to pay attention to material things at the expense of giving our families and friends our real attention, care, concern, and love. What is at issue is the way we have failed to love, failed to love and respect others, and failed to have love and respect for ourselves. As God's children, we all deserve to be loved and respected.

The wonderful thing about Advent is that in the end, we are given the certainty of God's presence in our lives in Jesus Christ. Advent is all about our expectant faith in the God who loves us enough to send us only Son. And if we receive Him in our hearts and souls, deep down then the change that we enter into will move us from where we are into the certainty of God's abiding love deep within us to empower us to deal with our selves, and to love ourselves and those around us as He commands us.

The Book of Genesis give us a picture in which God created us to live in happiness. His intention was that we live in love, peace and harmony, harmony with our world and harmony in our human relationships. **This is the joyful hope that is the Christian life.**

In the First Reading, the prophet Isaiah gives voice to the eager hopes of his people who confidently awaited the messiah and all that his reign would bring. This was fulfilled in Jesus.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul says, “Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Everything in the Bible was written so that we might have hope. **By** hope, we become new men and women. **In** hope, we are saved. **With** hope is great joy!

In the Gospel, John proclaims that the waiting and messianic longings of his people are to be answered in the person and mission of Jesus. While we may never learn to enjoy the *waiting* which is a part of our everyday activities and lives, we are reminded, in today's liturgy, to *savor* the joyful waiting which is Advent. He comes, He shall not disappoint. Repentance, faith and communal harmony are all the welcome He desires.

Remember this: Advent is the time when we wait **NOT** for Christmas, but for **Christ**. We wait for Him to step into the doorway of our heart. We stand at the door and invite Him in. In today's gospel, it instructs us to prepare in the true spirit, that is, inwardly by which John beautifully announces: “Reform your lives, the Kingdom of God is at hand.” The Christmas Carol *Joy to the World* puts it beautifully, “Let every heart prepare Him room.” **So, is your heart prepared?**