

St. Luke takes great pains to make certain that we all understand that John the Baptist wasn't just some pious legend, but that he lived during the reigns of certain kings and the times of certain priests. Putting John in a particular place and time assures us that he was as real as you and I.

Why is that important? On this Second Sunday of Advent, we are asked to listen to and to be like John! John is bold and steadfast in his mission. He is steeped in the reality of his times and yet filled with hope for better. He is held as an example today because he heard and experienced and lived God's liberating word in the desert and was therefore able to preach it to others so effectively precisely because his life and message were one.

His voice shatters the silence of the wilderness with his cry: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

John was anything but ordinary. Everything about him, his hair, his clothes, and his diet set him apart from the average. He conformed entirely to the will of God which made him a non-conformist in the world.

There was nothing politically correct about the Baptist's message. He got right to the point and said what needed to be said. The Baptist taught the people of his day and our day that the Messiah comes to save us from the powers of deception, from despair and darkness and death, and to put us back on the path of peace and reconciliation so that we might find our way back to God.

In a very real way the Baptist's message is Advent!

Advent is an odd combination of waiting and hastening, suffering and joy, judgment and deliverance, apocalyptic woe and the hope of the coming of Christ at Christmas and at the end of the ages.

The message of Advent is not that everything is falling to pieces. Nor is it that God is in his heaven and therefore all is well with the world.

Rather the message of Advent is that even in a world filled with immorality, even when all hell is breaking loose on earth, God is coming! God has come! God is here!

And there is no doubt that the world is more beautiful, more peaceful and a kinder, more civilized place than it was up to the day before Christ's birth.

But another paradox exists, doesn't it? Even after the birth of Jesus, the world is still waiting. It awaits its freedom from hunger, war and oppression. It longs for deliverance from violence, persecution and suffering. Women are still less than equal to men in many parts of the world. Slavery and human trafficking are still a concern. People are killed because of their sex, color, beliefs, where they were born and before they are born. The Redeemer has come yet we all await our redemption.

Advent challenges us to look at the ways that we wait and the good that we do while waiting.

It tests us to look at the ways that we long for God, and the ways that we make God manifest to others. It dares us to examine the ways that we hope and the ways that we bring hope. It confronts us in our comfort to give comfort to the suffering.

Advent demands an active response from us.

John says "Prepare the way of the Lord"

Just as God prepared the way for the return of the exiles to Jerusalem in our first reading, we have to prepare the way for God to come in our lives.

We must level the mountains of pride which make it so difficult for us to really love God and our neighbor.

We must fill in the valleys of our weakness and selfishness.

We must make the path to our heart straight by living prayerful, reflective and holy lives.

We ourselves are to become voices in the wilderness of this imperfect world, pointing the way to Jesus – always to Jesus.

Jesus can be found and Jesus is near. But how many of our friends and neighbors know that because they know us?

Do our classmates and our coworkers see in us that Jesus is the fulfillment of our longing, our hoping and waiting? Who among us understands that Jesus alone can transform the deserts of our lives into living gardens of beauty and nourishment for the world? Who among us can say without wavering that our lives and our message are one?

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! We need you now more than ever!