

Christmas in our world today gets pretty crowded

All the sales at the mall

The things coming in the mail

Santa Claus, Rudolph, the elves, Frosty, the Grinch

Bing Crosby and Jimmy Stewart

The parties and family coming to town

Mostly good things to be sure

But they crowd out the meaning of Christmas

I heard a joke about two people out caroling

In the yard of one home

The sign from the Knights of Columbus

'Keep Christ in Christmas'

One says to the other

What is it about these Christians?

They have to bring religion into everything

So the Church gives us proper focus today

The central figure the second week of Advent is John the Baptist

With a message of repentance, to prepare the way

Because John knew repentance is only the beginning

Being sorry falls short of the final goal

It is necessary, critical, even

But ultimately it leads to something else

John comes preaching repentance

Pointing the way to the one who will bring forgiveness

One who will bring salvation

So the path to salvation leads through repentance

The path to Christmas is the message of the Baptist

We continue our reading from Isaiah

The people of Israel are in exile

They are being held as slaves

Isaiah comes with a promise

The Lord will come

But it goes even deeper

He actually tells them the Lord has come

He is here

This mystery of Isaiah is his message to his people is twofold

They will be freed

And they are freed

He is going beyond the physical slavery they are experiencing

And he tells them that will come to an end

But he also speaks to slavery to sin

And that freedom begins today

Just as we spoke of the three Advent's last week

There is the physical Advent

Fulfilled when the Christ child was born

And there will be a final Advent

When Christ returns in power glory

Where all doubt will be removed

And there is our Advent

Preparing the way of our hearts

So Christ may reign in us today

The expectation of the Israelites is as real today as it was for them

This third Advent is important

Because without it

We can get stuck

We can become impatient

Despondent

Like those St Peter writes to in our 2nd reading

They were convinced Christ would return

But their expectation was immediate

They thought during their lifetimes it would be fulfilled

And when he did not return

When many in their community began to die

And no sign was coming that the return was imminent

They began to doubt

To question if what they heard was true

Was Christ going to return?

Was it even in his power to do so?

But we are called to realize the God's ways are not our ways

We have to know who God is

And who isn't God

'You have heard it before; *'if I were God...'*

Well none of us is God

And any delay is for our good

It is for the salvation of all

God is patient with our lack of holiness

We, too, are called to be patient with Him

This patience is what John the Baptist calls us to

Prepare the way of the Lord

This is an active patience

Not an advent of doing nothing

But an Advent of preparation

Filling in the valleys in our hearts

Striving to remove the boulders blocking us from God

John caught the attention of the people

By what he wore and what he ate

By his radical message of repentance

But he did not keep the attention on himself

He deflected it to the one who is to come

He is the messenger

I baptize with water

He will baptize with the Holy Spirit

He knows he is only the messenger

The one we await is close at hand

Our Gospel opened with some interesting words

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

As we read the beginning of the Gospel

We are called to allow it into our hearts and minds again

Something that goes against our culture today

As I told the kids this week

We live in a society where we want what we want

And we want it now

No waiting

No sacrifice

Instant gratification

All the worlds problems solved in a half hour or hour TV show

But that is not John's message

He calls us to prepare

Build a strong foundation

Fill in the valleys

Clear the boulders

Make smooth the way of the Lord

This is not something done in a half hour

It is not something we can do in four weeks

It is something that takes a lifetime

That is why we celebrate Advent again and again

Year in and year out

Some of the valleys are pretty deep

Some of the boulders are huge

But with God's grace

And our cooperation

We can begin

What is promised in the future

Is made present today

This gives us a new way of living

Too often we live in the past

We rut around in our mistakes

But we are called to more

We are called to live the future today

Living in the imagination of what can be

Our choices and actions are a reflection of the promise we can be

saved

And our lives become the message to the world that we are saved

This is the mystery of Advent

We wait and prepare for the future coming of Christ

For our salvation

By living as if we are already saved

This is salvation history

The promise of our salvation

Played out in the history of the world

Leading each one of us here today

To this celebration of the Eucharist

Right here in Prairie du Chien

To hear the Word of God

To receive him in the Eucharist

To repent of our sins

To thank God for his patience with me

To hear the beginning of the Gospel again

To allow the Gospel to change me

To prepare our hearts

So he can enter

And we can become his disciples to the ends of the world

Building his kingdom and waiting for his return