

The Second Week of Advent
December 6, 2015

Today's Gospel begins with a solemn introduction. We've heard the names of the great leaders of the day: Herod and Philip the Tetrarchs who ruled over Palestine in the name of the Romans, the Governor Pontius Pilate, the priest Annus and the high priest of the temple Caiaphas. It would seem that something momentous is about to happen.

You might think that this was the announcement of the birth of Jesus. But it isn't. Not yet. And yet the event that is announced is of tremendous importance: The Word of the Lord came to John the Baptist. And then John was sent to preach a baptism of repentance and calling people to prepare the way of the Lord.

What St. Luke is saying is that at a specific time and place, God intervened in human history. And it was John's job to make sure that the path for Jesus was made straight and smooth.

You know, whenever the president visits a city, great teams of people go out weeks and months in advance to make sure that the place where the president will be visiting is safe and secure. When Pope Francis visited the United State, it took literally thousands of people months to prepare for his visit.

John was doing a similar kind of advance work for Jesus by making straight the paths, filling in the valleys and leveling the mountains. And he did this by preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins. He was setting the stage for

the entrance of the Messiah long awaited by the people of Israel.

We are also waiting for the coming of Jesus and each of us are called, by virtue of our baptism, to follow John's example of making straight the path for the coming of our Lord. All we have to do is look around at the state of our world to see that we have our work cut out for us.

Jesus Christ is coming again and the Holy Season of Advent is a time of prayer and preparation. And so that we can effectively prepare the way for the Lord, we pray that we might listen when the Word of God comes to us. And we pray that we might respond to the Word of God by going into action as Christians even if our particular actions seem unimportant.

But what is it exactly that we must do to prepare ourselves for Jesus coming?

We might begin by turning away from our sins, from the distracting things of our material lives, and turn toward God, asking His pardon and forgiveness in so far as we pardon and forgive others in our life.

We might try and find a way to make peace with the things in our life that are holding us back - a relative we haven't spoken to, a neighbor we are angry with, a co-worker that has slighted us or driven us crazy.

We might notice that someone is having a bad day, so we stop by to cheer him or her up. We give a call to someone who is hurting. We stop by a hospital. We offer a smile and a word of encouragement to the harried department store

clerk. It's the little things we do that can have.

Perhaps, they might seem to hardly have any weight in the world, but the Word God can work marvelous changes when it is allowed into someone's life. The person having a bad day feels love and starts seeing his or her day in perspective. The call to someone who is hurting results in that person realizing that he or she is not alone, that God is with them.

The sick person in the hospital sees his visitor in a new light and thanks God for this.

The stressed out department store clerk is strengthened by our compassion. Paul reminds us that we are never alone or unequipped for the challenges of discipleship. God has begun this good work in us and will see it to fulfillment. It is God and God's grace that will enable us to prepare the way of the Lord, straighten what has become crooked, and level the molehills in our relationships that may have morphed into mountains.

What better way to begin our observance for the Year of Mercy that begins on Tuesday on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception?