

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths: all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

Today John the Baptist appears in the wilderness calling on everyone to wake up and prepare a way for the Lord. Let us be conscious of what He is calling us to do; and let us be awake and alert to God's call.

"IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK a lot like Christmas." Those are the words of a popular song from a few years ago. But Christmas these days is becoming so crowded! Parking lots are full of cars; stores are filled with shoppers; the shopping fliers in the newspapers are multiplying; it seems that a lot of buying is going on. Christmas has become crowded.

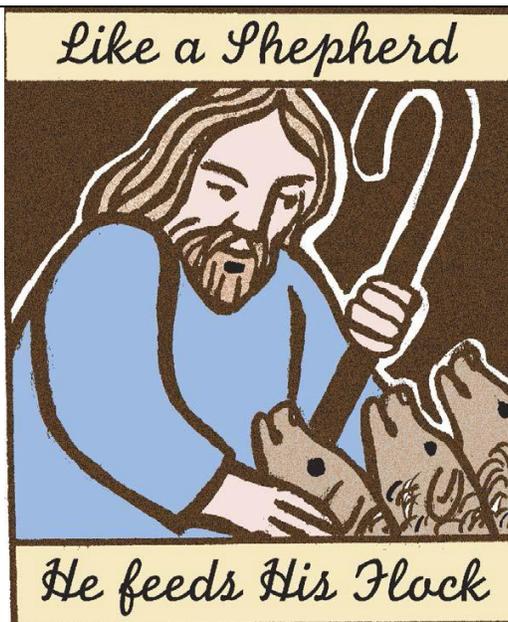
And so, has the manger scene: slowly as the nativity scenes start to appear here and there, we have the familiar figures of Mary and Joseph, of course, but also shepherds, cattle, the wise men, a half-dozen farm animals. New figures from our popular culture have slipped into the picture: Santa and his elves, Rudolph and other reindeer, the little drummer boy; Frosty the Snowman; the Scrooge, Tiny Tim and assorted Muppets.

We are becoming accustomed to these Christmas additions from popular culture. As all these figures intrude on the manger, it's sometimes hard to see the Lord Jesus.

With all this Christmas crowding at the manger, there is one figure that our culture always leaves out. You won't find this person in any Christmas stores, not even in our religious goods stores, never in any Christmas cards but this person is crucial to an honest Christmas.

The great missing person of Christmas is John the Baptist. We don't receive many cards with John the Baptist's words about repentance on them. And there aren't many Christmas jingles about John the Baptist. But the Church places him center stage on the second Sunday of Advent because John the Baptist is the very voice of Advent, the voice that points to the coming of the Lord Jesus to transform our life.

The message of John the Baptist to all of us is to prepare. The kind of preparation he speaks of is not found in shopping malls. It is the much deeper preparation of our life and soul for Christ. John speaks about preparing the way for the Lord, in terms of getting rid of the bumps and holes in our life to make a straight path for the Lord.



Christmas time brings strong hopes and dreams in our lives: thoughts of family, friendship, and fellowship. We look to a world of peace and harmony where people care about each other or at least respect each other and live in their dignity as people of God. We dream of building a great spiritual structure in our life, a strong marriage, trusted friendships, a family in harmony, a powerful spirituality and the experience of Christ's grace and purpose in our lives.

There is a comic strip called Hagar the Horrible. One strip showed Hagar complaining about something. Someone says to him

"It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." Hagar thought a while and said, "I prefer to curse the darkness."

Renewal in our life (or in the Church) requires repentance. Renewal and repentance always go together. Sometimes, it's a lot easier to curse the darkness.

In the middle of this crowded season, let's make room for John the Baptist and his message of repentance, he reminds us that we should be getting ready not just for another holiday season but to renew our lives in the power of Christ by getting rid of the obstacles that block our full experience of the Lord's grace and power in our lives. He reminds us that we can change. With John the Baptist, Christmas will not just be a holiday season but a healing season as well.



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