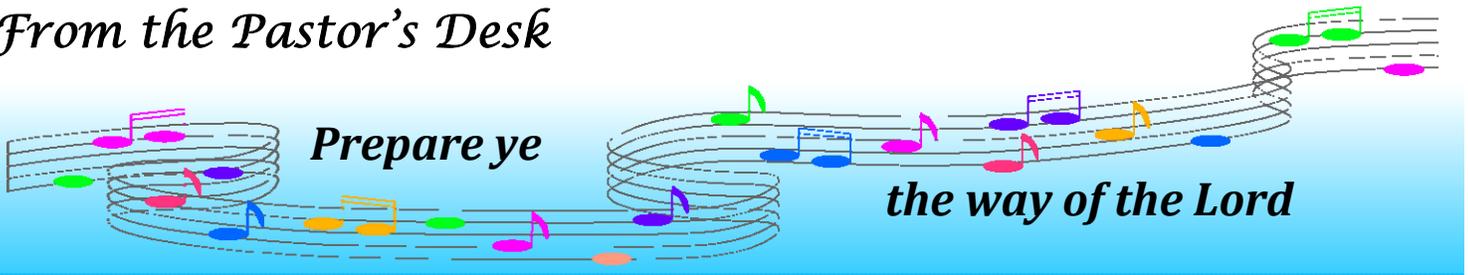


From the Pastor's Desk



I have heard so often, and indeed the first sentence of the introductory reflection in the Missalette for today's celebration reaffirms: "*We are given Advent each year as a time to **prepare***" (emphasis mine). I, personally, think that is not exactly the best word to use for Advent. Rather, it is a time of **discovery**, a time to become more fully aware of the wonders the Lord **is** doing, a time to be immersed in awe and silence at the great majesty and goodness of God and the beauty of all of God's creation, a time to ponder deeply the overwhelming miracle of Christ's humanity, love and gift of salvation. Advent is a time of new vision, a time of longing to see more clearly and more fully all that God is doing in each of our lives, in the Church and in the world. Advent is the most joyful of seasons! A time of great expectations! And it is quintessentially a season of profound **hope**.

John the Baptist's great plea, "*Prepare the way of the Lord,*" challenges us to realize and internalize all that God, in Christ, is doing in our own lives at this very moment; and with a new and deeper sense of peace to walk in the way of the Lord Jesus. Wonder and awe are Advent grace, Advent mystery, and Advent's call. We can't just **wander** through Advent; we must **wonder** through Advent!

Each time the Israelites experienced the great power of God, they turned to God in prayer, in thanksgiving and praise.

The people of Jerusalem had been driven out by the Babylonians during Baruch's time. But Baruch envisions, indeed prophesies, a day when the Chosen People will return to the holy city, the City of Promise. (Look how often Baruch uses the words "glory" and "splendor.") Baruch holds onto God's promise of transformation, when all things will be renewed, when misery will be changed to joy! Jerusalem will be named "the peace of God's justice" (Baruch 5:4). (By the way, a city can only be called "God's justice" when its inhabitants strive to

bring justice to all, especially those who live without means and without the opportunity or the power to change their situation.) A city is God's justice when its people are God's justice!

John the Baptist appears in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance, a baptism that is, at the same time, both wonderful and challenging. The baptism is cleansing and life-giving, but still, repentance is difficult. John's baptism calls for action from God; it also calls for action from those who receive it. John's baptism echoes Isaiah, who proclaims both "*make straight his paths*" and "*the winding roads shall be made straight.*" God acts! Touched by God's mercy and grace, we act! God and God's people — a marvelous interrelationship! God is Emanuel! And we are the people conscious that "*God is with us.*"

Saint Paul prays for the Philippians, "*that the one who began a good work in you will continue to bring it to completion until the very day of Christ Jesus.*" Paul's prayer is truly appropriate for us, especially in this holy season of wonder and awe, of transformation and grace.

John the Baptist was a man on a mission; he sees himself as a road builder. He is building a highway for the arrival of the Lord. All obstacles will be eliminated. A winding road? It will be straightened! A mountain or gorge in the way? It will be leveled! Whatever is needed to prepare the way and speed the arrival of the Lord, will be, must be, done.

That is Advent! Preparing the way of the Lord into our own hearts! Preparing our way into the very heart of God!

"*Stand erect and raise your head!*" Notice the good things of the Lord in the land of the living! Be Advent people!

Fr. Bob

Mary, Mother of God



The **Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**, on Tuesday, **January 1st**, is a Holy Day of Obligation, celebrating Mary as the mother of Jesus, who is both God and man.

Mass times: Monday, **December 31st**, 5:00 PM at St. Stephen
Tuesday, **January 1st**, 8:30 AM at St. Francis