

# Prepare the Way of the Lord

In some liturgical circles, last Sunday, November 27, marked the beginning of the season of Advent for the year 2011. This, the period beginning four Sundays before Christmas, is the time of year during which we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Lord. On a natural plane, we decorate our homes and buy gifts for family and friends; on a spiritual plane, we purify our hearts.

The spiritual tradition dates back to the days of John the Baptist, a man who was appointed by God to announce the coming of Christ and “prepare [His] way” (see Mal. 3:1) by encouraging the people to repent of their sins. The Bible tells us, “The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight” ‘ ” (Luke 3:2-4, NKJV).

When the people responded to John’s call to repent and be baptized, the evangelist discerned that many of them had not experienced a true change of heart; they were simply trying to escape judgment. So he exhorted them to show evidence of their salvation by bearing “fruits worthy of

repentance" (vv. 7-8)—in other words, by living differently than they had before. He warned them, " 'Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' " (v. 9).

The people were so convicted by John's warning that they implored him to tell them how to demonstrate that they were truly changed.

" 'What shall we do then?' " they asked him (v. 10). Fear of God's

"ax" made them want to become fruit-bearing trees!

The answers John gave them were keys to "preparing the way of the Lord" that I believe apply to our lives today—keys we can use

during this season of Advent to prepare our hearts to receive Him in a fresh way.

The first key is to share what we have with those who are less fortunate. " 'He who has two tunics,' " John said, " 'let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise' " (v. 11).

Throughout the Scriptures we are admonished to give; what better way is there to show that we are Christ's disciples? Jesus gave the ultimate offering—His own life—for our benefit. Throughout the year, but during this season in particular, we should be encouraged to sacrifice so that others will be blessed.

The second key is to avoid greed. When the tax collectors

asked John what they could do to bear fruit "worthy of repentance,"

he told them, " 'Collect no more than what is appointed for you' "

(v. 13). Many of them were in the habit of extorting more money from the citizens for taxes than was required by law and pocketing the extra so that they could live well at others' expense.

Most of us are not in a position to extort money; however, we are often guilty of continually seeking more in the way of material goods.

This is the sin of greed—the excessive acquisition of "things." It

is frequently evidenced at Christmastime, when we purchase more than is

needful, sometimes with money we don't have, simply because we want it—or

because someone we love has put it on his or her wish list. Parents who

inundate their children with gifts at the holidays are in danger not only of committing

the sin themselves but also of planting the seed for it in their offspring.

But we don't have to give in to our buying impulses and our constant quest for "more." There is a better way—a way that will

help us prepare HIS way. And that is to be led by the Holy Spirit in all our

purchasing. He will tell us WHEN to get WHAT and HOW MUCH, if we take the time

to listen to His direction.

The third and final key is to walk in love in our relationships with others. John told the soldiers who asked him, " 'And

what shall we do?' " not to " 'intimidate anyone or accuse falsely'  
" (v. 14).

Obviously, the soldiers had authority over the citizens and were in a perfect position to lord it over them—even to arrest them under false charges if they wanted to. But John admonished them not to exercise their authority in harmful ways. To bear fruit worthy of repentance, they had to treat the people fairly.

Not many of us are soldiers. But we are definitely prone to developing a pecking order and to looking down on those we consider lower in the social (or spiritual) structure than ourselves. When we set ourselves up on a self-constructed pedestal, we intimidate those around us. Yet the Bible says we are to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit"; instead, we are to "in humility consider others better than [ourselves]" (Phil. 2:3, NIV). This is part of what it means to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39).

John the Baptist's message is still current. Let's respond to it today by repenting of our sins and giving evidence that we have turned away from them by sharing with others, avoiding greed in all its forms and walking in love—in essence, doing the opposite of whatever sinful behavior we have been exhibiting. What a great way to "prepare the way of the Lord" in our own hearts!

## PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 12/5/11

This week ask God how He wants you to approach the season and set your priorities accordingly. When you pray about what to give to friends and family, remember to include the poor and needy and think of those separated from their loved ones at this time. Thank Him for His sustained mercy and continued protection over our nation, and pray that our leaders would turn to God for wisdom and direction concerning it, our support of Israel, and our global responsibilities. Ask Him for opportunities to share the gospel and show His love in tangible ways. -39

*To enrich your prayer life and learn how to strategically pray with power by using appropriate scriptures, we recommend the following sources by Apostle John Eckhardt: Prayers that Rout Demons, Prayers that Bring Healing, Prayers that Release Heaven on Earth and Prayers that Break Curses. To order any or all of these [click here](#).*