

Advent is a **time of preparation**. However, we can lose sight of the spirit of the season in our shopping frenzy. All of those “sales” signs can make us lose the reason for the season.

It is not Christmas yet. It is not time for celebration yet. It is, however, a time of preparation. In 586BC, King Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem and carried away many of God’s people into exile in Babylonia and scattered others. That is the context of the **first reading**, where Jerusalem is compared to a widow who has lost her husband and children. Prophet Baruch comes with a message of hope. He is inviting Jerusalem to take off her robe of mourning and misery—for her children are now going to return. God will bring them back from the east and west. The mountains will be made low, and the valleys will be filled so that His children can return. Thus, the prophet is asking Jerusalem to get ready to welcome her children.

A young monk one day went to the abbot and said, “Life is unbearable. I cannot continue here anymore. We are nine of us living in that tiny little room.” The abbot said, “As you go out, you will find a goat in the field. Take that goat into the room with you.” The monk said, “That is crazy to take a goat into our room. I will never do that.” The abbot told him, “Do as you are told, and come back after a week.” The young monk was completely lost. He went to complain to the abbot to make his life comfortable, but now it has become miserable. A week later, he came back to the abbot almost half dead and said, “We can’t stand it anymore. The goat is filthy and smelling.” The abbot said, “Go back and send the goat out, and come back in a week’s time.” The young monk returned a week later, happy and joyful. He said, “Life is so beautiful. We enjoy every minute. **No goat—just the nine of us!**”

All of us have a reason to be joyful and happy in this life. But, sin is an **obstacle to our joy and happiness**. We need to get that out of our minds and hearts. But, Satan is working overtime to convince us that sin adds to human happiness. That is **Satan’s biggest lie**. And many of us buy into it. We tend to think that it is OK to do something as long as that makes us happy. Happiness becomes the measuring rod. But, there are also sins that can bring false happiness.

In the pursuit of happiness, we cannot indulge in sin and evil. We need to rid ourselves of both. That is the call of St. John the Baptist in the Gospel of today.



As the Gospel tells, he came proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We are in the season of Advent, preparing to celebrate the historical coming of Christ, His second coming—and His coming in the Eucharist.

We have to prepare for it in the same way that John the Baptist prepared the people of

his day for the first coming of Christ. He told them to repent and turn away from their sins.

Apart from John the Baptist, we hear a number of other names in the Gospel of today. Tiberius Caesar was the Roman emperor who reigned from 14 to 37AD. Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, appointed by Rome, from 26 to 36AD. After Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided into four regions—each governed by a tetrarch, also appointed by Rome. Herod Antipas, who was a son of Herod the Great, was the tetrarch from 4BC to 39AD. Philip, another son of Herod’s, was the tetrarch from 4BC to 34AD. Lysenius was the tetrarch about the year 28AD. Caiaphas was the high priest from 18 to 36AD. Luke is including all these historical figures because Christianity is a historical religion. Events in Christianity happened at a specific time and place. They are not myths. These are **historical figures** and only historians are interested in them. They are remembered for historical reasons. But, John the Baptist is remembered with love and devotion. A man whose greatness consists of worldly power and positions fades, but the man whose greatness lies in character and holiness endures forever.

Holiness and sin cannot go together. So John the Baptist calls us to repentance. “Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight His paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.” We need to make the path straight by our repentance. We need to remove from us the mountain of pride. The valley that exists between the faith we profess and the life we lead needs to be filled with the truth of the Gospel. The crooked and the questionable paths that we take to achieve our goals need to be brought in line with the light of the Gospel. The rough, mean and uncourteous ways we deal with others need to be permeated with the love and gentleness of Christ. This is repentance. This is conversion. This is the best way to prepare for Christ’s coming. Prepare your mind and hearts through repentance, for the Lord is coming.