

CHRISTMAS 2017

During the Season of Advent, we have heard from Saint John the Baptist. He proclaimed the words of Isaiah, **“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths (Mt 3:3).”** Later Saint John also said,

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11).”

Not long after saying this, one of the sons of King Herod the Great, his name was Herod Antipas, had Saint John imprisoned. He did this after Saint John had rebuked him for living in sin with his brother's wife. It was from prison that Saint John began to hear reports about Jesus and about what He was saying and doing.

So, Saint John sent word to Jesus and asked Him, **“Are you He who is to come, or shall we look for another? (Mt 11:3)”** In reply, Jesus sent this message:

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them (11:4-6).”

By His answer, Jesus confirmed that He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah, the one who would save His people from their sins.

Then, Jesus turned to the crowds who had followed Him and who had heard His answer to Saint John, and Jesus asked them,

“What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? Why did you go out? To see a prophet?”

Jesus then said that Saint John was more than a prophet. In fact, he the one of whom it was written, **“Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee.”** Here again, Jesus declares that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the World.

Now, almost 2000 years after this took place, we are gathered here in this Church on this Christmas. We might ask ourselves the same question Jesus put to the crowds back then, namely, *“What did you go out into the wilderness to behold?”* or to put it into more modern terms, *“Why did you come here today?” “What were you hoping to find?” “What do you seek?”*

Each of us has our own answer to these questions. Many of us are here because we believe that the little child born in Bethlehem was not just another baby, but was in fact the Word made flesh, the very Son of God and our Savior.

On the other hand, some of you have come with questions. Could it be, is it possible that the faith held by Christians is true? Could it be that an angel really did say to the shepherds, **“Behold, I bring you news of a great joy, for unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord?”** Did a newborn child really grow up to die on a cross and in so doing, save the world? Could that really be true?

Then again, some of you have come but do not believe. You say that our faith in Christ Jesus is misplaced, that it’s not true, but you still come because you once believed, and you recall with a certain nostalgia that, when you still had faith, there was a certain peace in your heart. Faith is something you’ve outgrown, but there is still something about it you miss from time to time.

Even though we aren’t all be here for the same reasons, there is one thing we all do have in common, namely, that we have all taken time out for Christmas. Today, we have all departed from our regular routines.

For most of us, it’s to worship Christ our Savior, the infant who was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger.

However, if not for worship, it’s because Christmas is still special to us. We remember our mother baking cookies. We remember our grandfather telling stories; we remember our father cutting the tree and fitting it for the stand, and we remember seeing our uncles and aunts and our cousins and friends and those whom we love.

We remember singing Christmas carols and playing music and the beautiful decorations, and we remember going to Mass at night or in the morning and listening to the choirs sing. We remember the manger scene in our home and the little figures of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, and these memories are sweet and they give us peace ...

And these memories should tell us something ... You know, there are great truths associated with Christmas. There are great truths about the nature of man and about sin and about redemption and about God’s love.

When we look at our often hectic lives, and how things are in the world, and when we watch the news and hear about the world’s problems, we can get very depressed. That’s because the world can never offer us peace and happiness.

Sure, it can entertain us for a time. It can excite us for a time. Yes, things will come and go that interest us. Projects at work. Events in the news and so on. However, these things do not fill the soul, and we do have a soul, and we need to remember that the only thing that can fill our souls is God.

On the other hand, when we consider what Christmas is all about (as opposed to the holidays), when we consider how we feel at Christmas, we recognize that there is a big difference, and quite frankly, the reason for this difference isn’t all that mysterious.

The reason we are attracted to Christmas is partly because we have set aside the distractions of daily life, at least for a day, and turned to the needs of our souls. The reason we are more at peace at Christmas is because we are more conscious of God's love at this time.

Indeed, even those who no longer believe have a sense that this is true. Otherwise, why would they go home at Christmas to be with family and friends? Why would they participate in activities associated with Christmas? Why wouldn't they just treat Christmas like any other day? Why not just go to work?

In fact, deep down inside, even those without faith know that God is real and that He is calling them home to Himself and inviting them to rekindle the faith they once held.

You know, it really is the case that God exists. It really is true that the shepherds saw God in the flesh on that first Christmas night. It really is true that the angels proclaimed glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will. These things are true, and we know it because when we stop to consider them, we can feel in our hearts they are true.

We were made by God to be with God, and God loves us, more than we can possibly comprehend. We can sin, and He will still love us. We can ignore Him, and He will still love us. We can even reject Him and lose our faith in His holy Catholic Church, and He will still love us. The reason we know this is because people did all of those things before the Christ Child was born, and still the Father sent His Son to save us.

Jesus was born into the world to save us all, to save you and to save me, and He is the only one who can give us true peace and joy, and deep down we all know that.

So if we go back to those questions Jesus asked of the crowds, *"What did you go out into the wilderness to behold?" "Why did you come here today?" "What were you hoping to find?"* If we would go back to these questions, we would discover that there is only one answer, and that answer is Christ the Lord, He who is our God and Savior.

So, then, I urge you to turn to Him, to turn to Jesus, and not just on Christmas, but throughout the year. If you have been too busy for God this past year, slow down some. If you haven't been going to Mass each week, start going again.

If a worldly life has left you empty, try living a supernatural life. If sin has left you hurting, repent. Jesus Christ is why we are here today. We all need Him, each and every one of us, and we all need Him because He is truly the Lord of lords and Prince of Peace, and He is truly our Savior, and He truly loves us. Amen.