

“I am NOT the Christ!”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, there was a book called **The Day Christ Died**. I will now share with you a passage from that book, describing how Jews felt about the coming of the Messiah.

“The coming of the Messiah was a sweet, national obsession. It was joy beyond imagining, happiness beyond belief. It was comfort for the weary farmer’s bones as he lay in bed at night with his family, waiting for sleep. It was the dream of every gray-haired person. It was the thing a small child looked to a mountain of white clouds to see. It was the hope of Judea-in-chains. The Messiah was always the promise of tomorrow morning.”

And so, when John the Baptizer showed up at the Jordan River, people got really excited. John’s message was simple and to the point:

“Turn away from your sins... ‘Get the road ready for the Lord; make straight a path for him.’ ”^{Lk.3:3-4}

Before long, news of John’s activity reached the religious authorities in Jerusalem. So, they sent a delegation of Priests & Levites to talk to John. The Priests had a special interest in John because he was the son of a priest, Zechariah.

In Judaism, the only requirement for priesthood was heredity. If a man was descended from Aaron, no one could stop him from functioning as a priest. The priests in Jerusalem, therefore, were especially concerned about John and why he was behaving so ...strangely.

When the delegation of priests arrived, they got right down to business and asked John:

“Who are you?”

John knew what was on their mind—where they were coming from, so he said:

“I am NOT the Messiah.”

“If you are not the Messiah, who are you? Are you Elijah?”

This seems a strange question to us. **BUT** we must remember that Elijah is the prophet who, at the end of his life, was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Many Jews believed that Elijah would return when it was time for the Messiah to come.

But John said flatly that he was not the person who was taken to heaven centuries before in a fiery chariot.

“Are you a prophet, then?” they asked.

“No! I am not a prophet in the sense that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were prophets.”

“Who ARE you, then?” they asked.

John replied by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

“I am ‘the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!’ ”

Now, to appreciate John’s words, **“Make a straight path for the Lord to travel,”** I must remind you that few ancient roads were paved. Most ancient roads were simply mud paths...the way the cows went, so to speak. Thus, when a king planned to visit a certain town or village of his kingdom, he sent an **‘advance-man’** ahead of him to have the people fill up the mud holes, in other words, to patch up the pot-holes (like our Penn Dot does so well!) and to straighten out the path.

Another thing the **‘advance-man’** did was to instruct the people in the proper protocol for receiving the king.

Now, I get back to John and Jesus.

Concerning the proper protocol for receiving the Lord, John says:

“Turn away from your sins and be baptized.” *Mk. 1:4*

And so, we may rephrase John’s complete message this way:

“I am not the Messiah. But, I AM the Messiah’s ‘advance-man.’ Get ready, for he is coming!”

John does what every true religious leader ought to do. He turns attention away from himself and focuses it on Jesus.

And—“Why do I inform you that is what a good religious leader does?” you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

Because that is exactly what the Church does during Advent! It focuses our attention on Jesus. It acts as his **‘advance-man’** and tells us he is coming. Finally, it explains to us how to prepare for his coming.

Now, please realize that the ‘coming’ of Jesus, which the season of Advent/Church talks about, is not only his coming in history ^{Dec. 25}, but also his final coming at the end of history ^{the Parousia}. St. Matthew says of his final coming, the Parousia:

“When the Son of Man comes as King... he will sit on his royal throne and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him.

Then he will divide them into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats....

Then the king will say to the people on his right, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father!

Come and possess the kingdom....’

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Away from me ... to eternal fire.’” *Mt. 25:34-41*

So, to sum up the message of today’s readings:

- John is **NOT** the Messiah.
- He **IS** the Messiah’s ‘advance-man.’
- John tells us how to prepare for the coming of Jesus.
- And the coming we prepare for is not just for his 1st coming in history, as our Savior,
- **BUT** also for his 2nd coming at the end of history ^(personal or worldwide), as our judge.

I close with this special, Trinitarian Act of Contrition:

**“FATHER of Mercy & Creator, like the prodigal son, I return to you and say:
‘I have sinned against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son/daughter.’**

CHRIST JESUS, Savior of the World, I pray with the repentant thief:

(to whom you promised paradise)

‘Lord, remember me in your kingdom.’

HOLY SPIRIT, Sanctifier & Fountain of Divine Love, I call on you with trust:

‘Do purify my heart and help me to walk as a child of the light.’ ”

May our loving Father-Abba bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen