

A TIME OF ANTICIPATION AND PREPARATION

For many denominations, the four weeks prior to Christmas are the season of Advent. It is a time of anticipation and preparation. For some of us, it is an old friend. But for most of us, Advent is a part of our lives, but not a friend. The rest of the world is celebrating and we don't even sing Christmas carols. The rest of the world decorates their churches and we do not. It is one of the times when we are most out of phase with culture. Yet, deep down, we know that Advent is good for us. But don't like it. It is not comfortable. But it is good for us.

How DO most of us prepare for the anniversary of the Lord God Almighty coming to live among us? We buy ourselves into oblivion. We go to a year's worth of parties in one month. We overeat so much that we spend the next 11 months on a diet. We even listen to beautiful Christmas carols without, I would suggest, remembering what they celebrate, the coming of our Savior.

So what SHOULD we to do? We need to do what Christians have ALWAYS been called to do - Go against culture. Our model for Advent is John the Baptist. John is a much UNAppreciated figure of Bible, perhaps because we have so much trouble relating to someone who did not conform to his world at all. "John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey." (Matthew 3:4) Such attire and eating habits did not get him invited to many parties. Indeed, it could not have been very comfortable for him. Never the less, his message was clear, "PREPARE the way of the Lord." (Matthew 3:3) Our Advent should follow the example of John. Simplify in this time of excess. Diet when others of gorging. Slow down when others are speeding up.

I know some of you are saying that this is impossible. And, IF you plan to have the same Christmas as last year, you are right. But is that the Christmas that Christ is calling us to have? I don't think so. So if we are to model our preparing for the coming of Christ after John the Baptist, it means that we will not get done what everyone around us expect. Friends and even family will not understand. It will CERTAINLY increase the discomfort in your life, as

"Preparing the way" always does. In fact I would suggest that this Godly discomfort is a sign that we are doing God's will.

But what am I to do? How do I prepare? If you slow down, God will show you. If you pray more, God will tell you. If you lead a simpler life, God will bless you. If you focus on others less fortunate, God will provide all that you need. December is not about buying gifts or singing Carols. It is about anticipating and preparing for the coming of Almighty God to live among us.

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