

## PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

Advent is upon us! Advent is the four-week season of preparation for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. I'm sure you will take some time this Advent Season and read through the marvelous gospel accounts of the birth of Christ. However, there is one gospel account that seems to move right past Christmas into the life of Christ... the book of Mark. It's striking how Mark begins his gospel!

There is no angel Gabriel, no Mary and Joseph, no shepherds or chorus of heavenly angels, no overwhelmed innkeeper turning away the holy family... quite different than what we see in the book of Luke. There is no Joseph getting messages from God in his dreams, neither is there wise ones from the East following a star like we see in Matthew. And there is none of the soaring language of the Gospel of John about the Word existing from the beginning that reveals the glory of the Father.

Mark gives us none of this... he simply begins with, **"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."** And before you know it... we are not seeing a manger... but find ourselves elsewhere. We find that we are out in the wilderness, and we are reading the words of the prophet Isaiah saying, **"Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight."**

This is the true call of Advent- to be ready for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist is the "anti-Santa" that we need for today. John seems to call us to an "urgency" as we seek to share the good news (*joyful tidings*) of Jesus Christ to all those around us and to the uttermost parts of the world.

Wilderness living is no picnic. It's challenging and gives us all cause to pause and take notice of what is going on around us. These past few years, our

world's population has been living in and through the wilderness of a global pandemic. We have wrestled with the ongoing nature of this wilderness experience, seeking to find some level of relief as we go about our days. We are having to make daily choices about how we will individually respond, and we have sought to find hope for some return to normalcy in our lives. Yet... the challenges continue!

I was once told by a colleague in missionary care that the closer we get to the return of Christ, the more intense will be the battles we face. It seems like we are getting closer to His return, doesn't it?

I'm reminded of the great Shepherd's Song in Psalm 23 that gives me hope in my wandering in the desert of life. It assures me that I do not walk alone, and that I have a Shepherd that will lead, guide, restore and comfort me... as HE prepares the way before me.

I don't know what you may be experiencing this Advent Season but let me encourage you to cling to the good news of Christ. To claim Him as your redeemer and friend. To allow Him to bring His hope to your despair. To rest on His promises of peace and to proclaim the joyful good news to those who desperately need a Savior.

More than just remembering Christ's first coming, let this Advent bring hope and expectation for Christ's second coming. May we each model the life of John the Baptist as we **"Prepare the way for the Lord."**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS,**

**Perry Bradford**  
Executive Director

PS: Be encouraged by the following poem written by Sarah Bourns Crosby. Sarah is the pastor of Formation at Hope Church NYC where she teaches, mentors, and offers spiritual direction. Sarah has written a wonderful book called, "Pandemic Prayers & Poetry". You can purchase a copy through her [website](#). You can also find her on Instagram @sarahbournscrosby. I hope that you will find her poems and prayers encouraging and enriching!

## A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

By Sarah Bourns Crosby – Advent 2021

*This poem is based on the desert wanderings of God's people throughout history and throughout our own lives.*

*(Shared with permission)*

Dry and dusty, vast and empty  
This is a desolate place  
Wandering in circles  
Weakening every day.

Feet stumbling with each step  
Voices grumbling, under breath.

How did we ever get here?  
Why did we leave what we knew?  
When will we ever get there?  
What will we find if we do?

How long, O Lord? Will you forget us?  
How long will we lack what we need?  
How long will we wander this wilderness?  
How long will we search for peace?

...

But...  
Into the darkness  
Over the stillness  
A voice  
Crying  
In the wilderness:

"Prepare.  
His.  
Way.  
Make these desert paths  
Straight."

These dark mountains, made low  
These bleak valleys, raised high  
This hard soil, new growth  
This dry ground, fresh life.

And the glory of the Lord  
Will be revealed  
And all people  
Will see it.

Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God  
Creator, of the ends of the earth.

...

Yes, your Shepherd is coming  
You shall want no more,  
Leading you by still waters  
Restoring your soul.

Though you walk through the valley  
He'll stay right beside you  
His rod and his staff  
Gently comfort and guide you.

He prepares an abundance  
In your enemy's presence  
Sets a table before you  
Brimming with blessing.

And your cup  
Overflows  
And goodness and mercy  
Follow

You

(Yes you)

All the days of your life.

And you shall dwell,  
No more in the desert,  
But in the house of the Lord  
Forever.

...

May it be so.