

# *“Preparing for the Next Day and the Next Day, and...”*

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Matthew 3:1-12*

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I can't believe it, but I've actually purchased Shawn's Christmas gift, and waited 25 minutes to have it wrapped. Oh, and as I was leaving the store with this large, wrapped package, the alarm system went off. I quickly fled to my car and made my get away. If you see me on the news, don't believe what you hear.

Actually, when the alarm went off, I quickly turned around and went to the nearest checkout desk. I showed my receipt, and the woman gave me a choice, she could tear off the wrapping and de-alarm my box, or I could walk out with the alarm blazing. I chose the latter, noise and all.

I'm preparing for Christmas! Getting ready! As I'm sure you are also! I'm preparing for Christmas and our Advent Celebration at the Manse. Our Christmas tree is up. Wait until you see it! It's 9 feet tall and beautiful! And many wonderful, ornaments (gifts from the past) grace our Christmas tree.

All of us are preparing for Christmas, and doing so in a myriad of ways.

Only 16 days before Christmas! That's the deadline to be ready for. You're preparing your gift list. Gifts are being bought. Did I see you at Macy's yesterday morning at 5:00 a.m.? (Not much chance of that.)

Travel plans are being made, or have been made. Preparing. Victoria has prepared, bought her ticket and is flying home for Christmas from Olympia, Washington. You're preparing menus, guest rooms, and a hundred other plans are in the mix.

Friends, you know all too well what it means to prepare. Preparing is part of our nature. You prepare at home, at work, even at play (vacation plans). We prepare because at the very least we expect a future, - the next day. We would fail ourselves, and others if we neglected to prepare. On so many levels we take this preparing as a given.

We prepare for this or that, for the next day and the next day and the next day and... But, on a spiritual level can we take it for granted that we are expectant of the forthcoming good days of meaning, hope and fulfillment? Too many today fill their lives with preparing, looking forward to the mundane of life, and are nevertheless impoverished when it comes to preparing, to living lives, (expectant lives) that God, in Christ, has a plan for you. You matter! Not only today, but tomorrow and the next day and the next day and... Your life matters!

The lives around you matter, to the God of the universe! How much is your spiritual life involved in the preparing that takes place in your daily plans? Advent is a wondrous reminder, a wake up call to us Christians, that in all the preparing that we do, we must have a spiritual expectation that enlivens our lives forward, in fulfillment.

Enters the birth of Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist is out in the desert, next to the Jordan River preparing people for the arrival of the Kingdom of God, the reign of God, God in their lives! John refers to an ancient prophet who also knew something about preparing. John is mirroring the anxieties and hopes of all those around him. They have been waiting for so long for their lives to change. They've almost given up hope. The "same old, same old" of life "the next day and the next and the next are all the same," have almost eclipsed any conception that "life could be different." Yet here is this crazy man screaming at the top of his lungs, "Get ready, prepare!" because their lives are about to change radically! Now, actually what changed for them, in their encounter with Jesus was their perspective on life. Their outward situation did not change; the Romans still controlled their country, and the social structures remained unchanged. Bills still needed to be paid. Hurts, pains, betrayals didn't stop. But, those followers of Jesus changed, changed the way they prepared, looked at their future days! And that made all the difference!

Year in and year out Christianity has been declaring to all those who would hear, "Prepare the way of the Lord..." And concomitant with this declaration is, "Prepare to see and live in the world differently!" Prepare for this! Let it sink in! That's what this "baby in a manger" is all about! New birth has the capacity for difference, for change! Preparing to see with eyes beyond the same old, same old. Preparing to adjust your boring, "this is life, oh well" scenario. Advent, Christmas, Christ, remind us (for we humans have thick skulls that need so much reminding) life can be lived so differently, so joyously, so hopefully. So prepare to be surprised, changed! I'm talking about a way of life!

Christianity, in its purist form, stripped of all those pious and impious accoutrements, invites you and me to see and live life as though life really matters, because it does! Try it! Prepare for it! Since fifteen years of age, I have believed that Isaiah's and John's declarations strike to the heart of one's existence. When all is said and done, when you actually take a few minutes to meditate on the meaning of it all, when you get beyond your fear to look deeply into your own world – decide to listen to those words, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" or is all your preparation for nothing?

Prepare, for your life to be guided by a vision that uplifts lives, believes in love, stands firm for justice, and shares mercy!

Prepare! Live with expectation! Live into God's future!

Amen.