

## The Advent W.A.I.T.: Anticipate

Luke 3:1-6

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Rev. Billy Song - St. Mark's Presbyterian Church

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According to the US Postal Service, this is the busiest time of the year with everyone sending out Christmas cards and packages. Normally it takes 3-7 days, for domestic mail to be delivered, but during this time of the year that can easily take 2 weeks and sometimes more.

Which means you'll probably want to put your Christmas Cards in the mail sometime by the end of this week if you want your recipients to get them before Christmas!

I'm sure I just created a little panic for those of you at home, and so if I see any of you writing Christmas Cards during this sermon - well ~ that'll be ok. (Please just make sure you're sending one to me!)

*One Christmas season, there was a woman who waited until the last minute to send out her Christmas cards. So she rushed out to the store and quickly bought a pack of 50 Christmas cards without even given them a second look.*

*In a panic, wanting to make sure that she put them in the mail before the Post Office closed, she signed and addressed 49 of them and dropped them off, never actually pausing to read the pre-printed message inside of each card.*

*The next day, when she woke up on Christmas morning and things had quieted down, she chanced upon that one left over card from the box she had bought. She took the card in her hands, wanting to see the message that she sent to all her friends and family and to her dismay this is how the card read:*

***THIS CHRISTMAS CARD IS JUST TO SAY  
A BIG GIFT IS ON THE WAY!***

*Suddenly she realized that 49 of her closest friends and family were all anticipating a big gift - a gift that would never come!*

(just a little advice - make sure you read the message that is printed inside your Christmas cards before you put them in the mail !)

2 <sup>nd</sup> Theme in Advent: Anticipation.
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Our theme this morning, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sun in the Season of Advent, is the theme of "Anticipation" and the funny story you just heard kind of introduces the theme.

Can you imagine the reaction of all those 49 people - opening up that Christmas card and reading what it said:

*THIS CHRISTMAS CARD IS JUST TO SAY  
A BIG GIFT IS ON THE WAY!*

Maybe some of the recipients were expecting gift cards. Maybe a few of them were anticipating toys. Maybe some were hoping that they would receive clothing and maybe even some were hoping for cash.

Well, back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century when our scripture passage took place no one sent out Christmas cards, but if they did, I know what John the Baptist's card would have said - it would have said:

*Get ready everyone -  
because a big gift is one the way."*

Our theme this morning is the theme of Anticipation.

Anticipating the arrival of Christ and the Incarnation,  
Anticipating God breaking into our world,  
and Anticipating the Coming of the Lord!

Our scripture passage this morning tells us how we are to anticipate, and that is by "Preparing the way for the Lord."

Luke 3:1-6

*In the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar - when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip Tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitus and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.*

*He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*

*"A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all [humanity] will see God's salvation."*

John the Baptist's Christmas card would have read:

*"Prepare the way for the Lord because a big gift is coming!"*

*Straighten up! ~ all the paths!  
straighten up! ~ all the crooked roads,*

*Fill in ~ all the valleys,  
bring down ~ the mountains & hills,  
and smooth out all the rough edges!*

*Because the Christmas gift that's coming  
in the person of Jesus Christ,  
is finally on the way!*

On Expectations.

John the Baptist wanted everyone to anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ and as they waited and anticipated, he didn't want them to wait passively, but to wait with expectations.

This Advent season - this Christmas time, what are you expecting from God?

One Sunday morning, a very long time ago, after a worship service - as I was greeting people at the front door thanking them for coming to church, I made the embarrassing mistake of asking a young couple if they were pregnant (when they were not.)

It was so traumatic! I can't remember the exact words, but I must have said something like *"Congratulations! When are you expecting?"*

Their response was something like: *"Huh? What are you talking about?"* And so with my eyes - I pointed at the alleged "baby bump" protruding from the wife, and they said: *"Oh, we're not expecting."*

I'm pretty sure that was the exact moment that they decided to look for a new church, and after that experience I told myself never to say things like that again. (They should really teach these things in seminary!)

What was I thinking by saying: *"Are you expecting?!"*

That was definitely one of my most embarrassing moments, but do you notice the words we use when we talk about being pregnant? We use the word: "expecting."

Instead of saying: "Are you pregnant?" we say "Are you expecting?" And they can respond *"Yes! we're expecting"* or *"No, you clueless pastor, we're not expecting. But you can expect that we won't be here next week!"*

## "EXPECTING"

When a couple gets pregnant, when a couple is going to have a baby, we use the word "expecting."

And as they are "expecting" there's also a lot of anticipation. They are anticipating the day when their baby child will be born. They are anticipating the day their lives will turn upside down. They are anticipating a bundle of joy wrapped in a baby blanket.

They can also anticipate that their titles to be changed forever. "Wives" will now be called "mom's."  
"Husbands" will now be called "dad's."

and relationships, well, they can anticipate that their relationships will be changed all because they are "expecting."

When a young couple is "expecting" there's a lot to anticipate, and when a young couple is expecting there's also a lot to prepare!

Baby names have to be carefully chosen. Nurseries have to be set up. Baby cribs need to be meticulously assembled - why the whole entire house needs to be baby-proofed.

Oh there's lots to prepare when a baby is on the way!

John - on Preparing for Jesus.
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John the Baptist probably wouldn't have made the mistake of assuming a young couple was pregnant, and so he wouldn't have used the illustration that I just did.

Instead, the illustration he used in preparing for the arrival of Christ, had to do with something that everyone was familiar with and that was land.

John talked about the terrain. He talked about roads and pathways, mountains and valleys, and he talked about making them level or making them smooth & straight, almost as if John was a land surveyor.

John the Baptist wanted the people to prepare for God's arrival by prepping the roads, so that God's arrival would not be hindered or blocked by any obstacles.

At least twice a day I will be driving on Lomita Blvd. I take Lomita Blvd on my way to church - then I take Lomita Blvd on my way back home.

And so at least twice a day I am on Lomita Blvd and if I have any visitations or any errands to run, than sometimes even more.

For those of you who are familiar with Lomita Blvd, there is a major hospital located on that street and its Torrance Memorial Medical Center.

It's a big hospital and a good hospital. They have top notch doctors, and they have awesome nurses (well at least 1 awesome nurse - Paul Lange!) and so if you're ever driving on Lomita Blvd at any given time of day, there can be emergency vehicles (ambulances and paramedics) speeding towards that hospital.

According to the California Driver's Manual, when you see an emergency vehicle driving with their siren on and they're flashing their lights, you're supposed to yield the right of way. Specifically, you're supposed to pull over on the right side and come to a stop and wait until they have passed you. So, whenever I'm on Lomita Blvd or any other road, that's what I always do when I see an emergency vehicle.

But I'm amazed sometimes by some other drivers. Not only do they NOT pull over, some of them keep on driving and get in the way, so the emergency vehicles have to go around them!

Can I show you a picture of what they do in Germany?



If you're driving on the roads and traffic starts to back up, drivers will pull over to their respective sides of the road to clear a path in the middle for emergency vehicles to pass thru.



Here's an ambulance driving in-between cars.

Clear a path everyone!! Make room for the ambulance to pass through. Move over and come to a stop because something important wants to get through.

John the Baptist saw what was coming from far away.

He saw lights flashing (he saw stars twinkling.)

He heard sirens (he heard a company of heavenly hosts singing.)

So John did his best to let everyone know:

*"This is an emergency! The Savior is on His way! Prepare a way for the Lord!"*

This Advent Season, maybe there are some of you who need to "pull over" and "yield-the-road" to God. May there are some of you who need to come to a full stop and let Jesus draw near.

*"Prepare the way for the Lord!"*

## Mountains and Valleys

Now, in vs 5, John mentions several ways how we are to "Prepare the way for the Lord." He tells us to fill in every valley and to make low every mountain and hill. In other words - he is telling us to level the road.

Listen to the way the MSG version reads:

*Prepare God's arrival!*

*Make the road smooth and straight!*

*Every ditch will be filled in, every bump smoothed out,  
the detours straightened out, all the ruts - paved over.*

*Everyone will be there to see the parade of God's salvation.*

Isn't that a great image!

*Fill in the ditches, smooth out all the bumps, straighten the detours,  
pave over all the ruts.*

John the Baptist wanted the arrival of Christ to be the smoothest as possible.

Here at St. Mark's (in our parking lot) we have a few speed bumps. We have one in the south parking and we have another on the north, and their sole purpose is to slow you down!

I can tell you that they don't work that well because people still drive way too fast here - folks need to slow down!

Also in our parking lot we used to have a few pot holes that developed over the years - they've been fixed after we re-surfaced the parking lot, but if you ever drove over one - you sure felt it! Those will slow you down.

John the Baptist was talking about "filling in the pot holes" and "filling in the ditches" because Jesus was on His way.

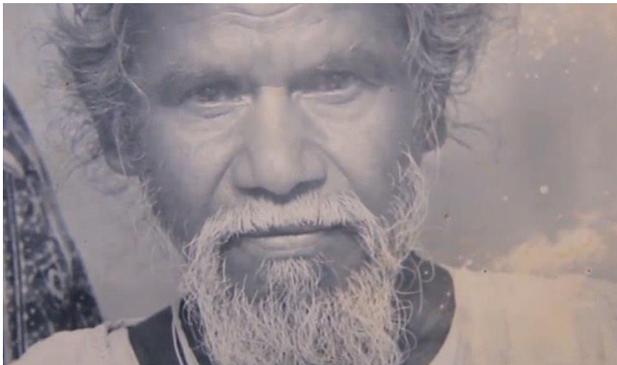
*Make the roads smooth and straight make them smooth and level,  
God is on His way in the person of Jesus Christ and that is something that  
you don't want to delay.*

Straighten out the detours

I especially like the way how the MSG trans says: "*Straighten out the detours.*"

If you've ever been on a detour - well then you know that it can take you the long way around.

I have to tell you the story of a man named Dashrath Manjhi.



Dashrath Manjhi was a man who lived in a small village in India called Bihar.

The village that he lived in was a very small village. It had no hospital, it had no market, it didn't even have a school.

The closest village that had any of those things was on the other side of a mountain which was impassable, and to go around the mountain was a 43 mile journey. 43 miles is easy to do with a car, but by foot it would take you all day! So, needless to say, people rarely made the trip to visit the nearest village.

For example, it would be impractical to try and go to school in that village because you'd always miss class. It would also be impractical to work at the other village - you would always show up late.

Well, Manjhi had a reason to go to the other village and his reason was that his wife fell ill and needed medical attention. But because the hospital was so far away, by the time he brought her there - she had died from her injuries.

Well, Manjhi didn't want anyone else to experience what he did and so he sold his family's 3 goats and bought a hammer and chisel and started pounding away at that mountain.



With only his hand tools and his love and memory of his wife, Manjhi worked day and night for 22 years.

He turned huge boulders into little rocks. He moved volumes of rubble all with his bare hands and when he was done - he had carved a road right thru that mountain and what used to be a 43 mile detour was now a little less than 1 mile!



People told Manji that he wouldn't be able to do it - "that he was a poor man who just needed to work and eat," but 22 years later the road that he cut out was 30 feet wide and in some places 25 feet high, and now people are able to get to the village in less than 1 hour.

A road that was built for the love of his wife completely changed life for the rest of the villagers. Children were able to go to school. People were able to find jobs. Trade/commerce flowed back and forth and of course, medical services were now accessible.

Manjhi might not have "brought down the mountain" like John the Baptist said in the passage, but what he did was he made the mountain - passable, and cleared a path for people to pass through.

As far as we know, Jesus never built any roads among the countless miracles that He performed. Jesus never used a hammer and chisel, to break down any boulders - He didn't move dirt around in the same way Manjhi did, (although one time Jesus used dirt to help a man regain his sight.)

Jesus never carved a path right through the heart of a mountain, but one thing He did do was to spend 33 years of his life - creating a path that reconnected us back to God.

And because of that path that started just outside Jerusalem on a hill far away called Golgotha, lives were changed forever, sins were washed away, and now we have access to our Heavenly Father once again.

This Advent Season and this second week, my charge to all of you is to look at your life and to examine the path and examine the road that connects you to God.

Are there any obstacles that need to be cleared? Are there any potholes that need to be filled? Are there any rough surfaces that need to be

smoothed down? Are there any spiritual issues that need to be broken and carried away?

Prepare the Way for the Lord. Anticipate the Lord's arrival and prepare with expectant hearts for the Lord desires to draw near!

A Closing Prayer.

*Heavenly Father, there's a lot we keep ourselves busy with around this time of the year. The trappings and trimmings, the shopping and shipping, all the things people do around this time of the year.*

*But we take a moment today to hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah, whose voice and whose words cut through all the holiday jingle, to prepare and to make ready - our lives for Jesus Christ again.*

*As we prepare and anticipate to celebrate His birthday again, help us to remember the joy of a Savior in our midst.*

*This we pray in Jesus name. Amen.*