

ADVENT: IN FAITH WE WAIT EXPECTANTLY FOR THE LORD

Second Sunday in Advent

December 10, 2006

Malachi 3:1-4 (or Baruch 5:1-9)

Luke 1:68-79

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

The Messenger Is On His Way

E-mail messages. Text messages. Voice mail messages. Pop-up messages on our computer screens. Messages on billboards and kiosks. Announcements that come to us through the media of radio, TV, newspapers, and magazines. In today's society, it is hard to escape the barrage of messages that seem to confront us at every turn – some welcoming and some not so.

Today's gospel lesson invites us to listen to a message being delivered by someone shouting in the desert, challenging us to "get the road ready for the Lord!" At a time when we are seeking peace and respite from the harsh noises of the world, do we really want to hear the voice of someone shouting at us with a command to prepare for something? Aren't our "To Do" lists already crammed with more tasks than we can reasonably manage? And what exactly does it mean to "get the road ready?"

Perhaps it is precisely because we feel so over-committed with our day-to-day cares that we need to pause and listen to this messenger who approaches us with shouts and loud cries. The LORD All-Powerful has sent this messenger to us (Malachi 3:1). He is on his way to us, coming to deliver God's promise of salvation.

John the Baptist was a prophet who preached in the desert not long before Jesus himself came to be baptized by John. This reference to the desert serves as a reminder of the exodus and the place where Israel was formed to be in a covenant relationship with God (Exodus 19:5, 6). John's appearance in the desert and calling people to turn back to God and be baptized represents the hope of restoration in a new exodus. By challenging God's people to be renewed, John was preparing the way for everyone to "see the saving power of God" (Luke 3:6, *CEV*).

John's father, Zechariah, prophesied that his son would "go ahead of the Lord to get everything ready for him" and "tell his people that they can be saved when their sins are forgiven" (Luke 1:76b, 77, *CEV*). In setting the stage for Jesus' public ministry, John exhorted the people to get ready for something new that God was about to do. And his message challenges us today to be open to ways in which we, too, can "get the road ready

for the Lord” (Luke 3:4b, *CEV*) and let God’s light “shine to guide us into a life of peace” (Luke 1:79b, *CEV*).

As the forerunner to God’s promised Messiah, John comes to us and announces God’s redemptive purpose. In the midst of today’s avalanche of messages, the one from John the Baptist is to be heeded. Don’t hit that delete key!

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: South Africa – With thanks to God for the growth in all aspects of Bible work and for the completion of the translation of the Bible for the Deaf in Afrikaans, and with prayers for the Southern Ndebele translation project and for God’s blessing on the many opportunities that the 11 official languages afford; **Gabon** – With thanks to God for improved Scripture distribution, and with prayers for plans to open new depots and for the expansion of the distribution center in Libreville and for the development of a new depot in Port-Gentil, and with prayers for negotiations for the return of property in Oyem; **Namibia** – With thanks to God for the success of the Bible-A-Month Club and mobile Bible shop, and for the good progress with the Khoekhoegowab translation project, and with prayers for the Khoekhoegowab literacy program, the HIV/AIDS prevention campaign, the *Living in Hope* audio project, the annual *Walk for Bibles*, and for closer links with churches.

Activity Corner: “Hopeful Hearts”

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper, heart pattern (approximately 6 inches high), scissors, pencils/pens.

Read together Luke 1:68-79. What hopes does Zechariah express in this hymn of praise? Cut out several hearts. On each one invite members of your household to write a message about something they hope for. Gather the hearts into a small basket. Each day during the week use the basket of hopeful hearts as part of your devotional time and pray about each hope that is expressed. Conclude by singing “Soon and Very Soon” or “Prepare the Royal Highway” or one of your favorite Advent carols.