

For about the past 6 or 7 weeks I had been fighting a case of pneumonia, which is why you haven't seen me up here for a while. I ask Father Patrick if I could take a little more time off just to make sure I was feeling better. So it seems fitting that I am able to come back today as a voice crying out in the desert.

In a way I think I can relate to John the Baptist, being away was like being in the desert but it was also a time to be able to catch up on some reading, getting some rest, and spending time just thinking. As the weeks went on I was starting to bite at the bit wanting to get back in the swing of things, but it seems God was telling me slow down, relax, listen I have a few things to tell you yet.

I wonder if John felt that way. Telling God, come on let me out there and get things ready for your coming. And God maybe responding whoa there John, relax, listen I have a few things to tell you yet. We will do this in my time. And here we are on the second Sunday of Advent getting ready to get ready.

Some think of Advent as a kind of a mini Lent and it may seem that way because of the call to repentance that John the Baptist preaches in the readings we hear these next weeks. John is calling the people to prepare the way of the Lord by crossing into a new Israel ready to extend God's justice and mercy to all nations. .

But it is different from the season of lent that we are familiar with. It not a time of sack cloth and ashes for many among us, this is the time of the year for going to our closets and retrieving from the mothballs those special sweaters, hats,

scarves and gloves that say “Christmas is coming!”

Images of Santa, angels, elves, snowmen, candy canes and twinkling lights adorn clothes that we would not wear at any other time of the year. Somehow, given the joyousness and anticipated excitement of the season, these funny outfits seem quite appropriate. Without speaking a word, they colorfully convey the fact that our annual celebration of Emmanuel, God-with-us, is near.

In a sense, the prophet Baruch was intent upon calling his generation to celebrate their experience of God in a similar way. He called for his listeners to put on their “glad rags” and celebrate! Put off misery and shame, says Baruch, and wrap yourselves in the glory and justice of God.

It is a time of preparation, and not just the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when we put up lights and decorations. It not just a time of cooking and cleaning and shopping though that is what many of us are doing.

Oh it’s a time of preparation alright, a time to look at where we are in our lives. A time to look at the good things that God is doing in our lives a time we can say “The Lord *has* done great things for us; we *are filled* with joy” and a time to celebrate the things that He has in store for us.

It’s a time of anticipation as well, a time when we should have that funny feeling in our gut. Like when you were a small child and you just can’t wait because

you know something is going to happen soon, you just don't know what.

A time when someone you haven't seen in a while will be dropping in, you know they are coming you just don't know when they will show up. You keep watch out the window; every car coming down the road could be them.

It's an occasion where we don't spend time looking back or even thinking about the moment but a time we are looking ahead. It's a time of wonderment where you ask yourself, am I ready for this, is everything in place.

Advent is the "now," and the "not yet." It is the waiting for something that will be. Advent is the tree waiting for lights, the package waiting for wrapping paper, the child waiting on a wish. It is the candle waiting for a flame, the manger waiting for a baby. It is the world waiting for its savior.

This year, Advent may also be the father waiting for a job, or business owner waiting for a sale, or the mother with a family waiting for the next unemployment check.

It is an event that brings about a type of nervousness, not the type of "will things turnout the way I planned" but a type of I can't wait, why isn't it here yet, what is keeping it.

Everything, and everyone, waits, that's what Advent is all about.

This Advent, using our traditions of decorating homes and trees, setting out manger scenes, and even hanging "stockings by the chimney with care," we must reclaim the fervor that John brought. Christ is coming. We must make ready. We do not want to destroy our Advent and Christmas traditions, but Advent should help us peel away the non-religious aspects of our traditions and help us reclaim what they were originally meant to do, that is, teach us about Christ coming into the world.

Christ has come once, in preparing for Christmas we are really preparing for Him to come again. As the psalm says, "we are filled with joy."