

## **Advent Reading for Tuesday, December 12, 2017**

### ***“A Faithful Forerunner” (Isaiah 40:3-5)***

Today's reading has as its backdrop a custom of many eastern monarchs who would send heralds before their coming to clear away obstacles, build causeways, straighten crooked roads and valleys, even leveling hills. Isaiah foretells of one who would come before the Messiah with essentially this same responsibility: *“A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”* (40:3-5).

In terms of fulfillment, each of the four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, point to John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. While Jesus was living in Nazareth of Galilee before He began His ministry, Matthew, for example, introduced John with these words: *“Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, ‘THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT’”* (3:1-3).

Luke, with his characteristically great detail, explained precisely when the ministry of John the Baptist occurred and then stated: *“And he came into all the district 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* (3:3-4). Luke goes on to quote a significant portion of Isaiah's prophecy.

John the Baptist's ministry was to call the people to prepare their hearts spiritually for the coming of the Messiah. Though he was only *the voice of one*, John was faithful to his calling. In no way was John the Baptist a rival of Jesus, for Jesus began His ministry by preaching the same message of repentance (Luke 4:17). To repent meant more than to *be sorry* or to *change their minds*; John's message of repentance echoed the Old Testament prophet's frequent summons for Israel to *abandon their rebellion, and return to God & His covenant*.

Because John was extraordinarily eloquent and persuasive, the Apostle John explained how some questioned if he might be the Messiah (John 1:19-23). John the Baptist clarified his identity by referring to Isaiah's prophecy which is our focus for today. Later he humbly expanded on the difference between himself and Jesus: *"He must increase, but I must bring 'decrease' here.* (John 3:30).

While the ministry of John the Baptist was prophetically foretold by Isaiah, and highlighted by each of the gospel writers, there is a sense in which our ministry is essentially the same as His; we are called to prepare the way for Christ! As His ambassadors (II Corinthians 5:20), by our exemplary lives and our gracious words, we are to seek to remove the barriers that hinder our unbelieving family members and friends from trusting Christ.

**Giving Thanks – Thank you for way John the Baptist was faithful to his calling; help us to point others to You even as he did.**