



## Thoughts on the Journey...

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Would we recognize him?

If he walked among us today and we heard his message would we take heed? I would venture to say that most people of John the Baptist's time would think he was an odd man. He

dressed in camel's hair with a rope around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. That's odd, yes, but if he kept quiet and to himself, he may have gone unnoticed. Instead, John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's prediction. *"A voice of one crying out in the desert... proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"*

When I looked intently into the eyes of my newly baptized grandson the other day, I thought about his future and where his journey of faith will lead him. Here he is today, so joy-filled, so trusting, so moldable, and so pure that you feel close to heaven when you are with him. As parents and grandparents, we all wonder what the future holds for our children. Like all of us baptized Christians, my grandchild was baptized priest, prophet, and king. I couldn't help but wonder how those roles will manifest themselves in his life. How will he bring Christ into his world? It was probably no different for St. Elizabeth and Zechariah when looking at their son, John. Do you think they had an inkling of the importance of his role in salvation history or the lengths their son would go to be a prophet.

John the Baptist was destined for the role of heralding the coming of the Lord. Even in Elizabeth's womb he leapt for joy at the sight of Mary already with Jesus in utero. Perhaps his one and only mission in life was to prepare people for the way of the Lord. It had to be a lonely mission at times. It would have required courage, faith, confidence in the prophets before him, belief that his cousin was the promised Messiah.

In preparing for this reflection, I tried to imagine what it would have been like to be living on the side of history before the birth of Jesus. We certainly have an advantage knowing the rest of the story. For John, I would imagine that reactions ran the gamut. For those whose attention was distracted by daily living, John's message was probably lost. For those who worshipped other gods, John's message was probably ignored or criticized. But, for those looking for the Messiah, John's message was probably a refreshing ray of hope.

We are really no different than the people of John's time. We are given the same message from Isaiah that John was given. We are given the historical message of John the Baptist in the Word of God telling us to prepare the way of the Lord. The message is addressed directly to us in this year 2018.

It's not premature to focus on the second coming of our Lord. It's not too late to adjust the landscape of our lives so that our path to our Savior is not cluttered with obstacles. It's time to look within and remove the baggage that's taking up room in our hearts. We make the path to our Lord more difficult because we create our own impediments that are a result of our sinfulness.

By our Baptism we are grafted onto and into Jesus Christ, and are made partakers in the divine nature. By virtue of our baptism, all members of the faithful share in the triple mission of Christ as priest, prophet, and king.

**"Hear me, O coastlands, listen, O distant peoples...I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."**

As priests, we have the responsibility to make our lives holy through prayer, service to others, and participating in the sacramental life of the church. As prophets, like John the Baptist, we are to teach and spread the good news of salvation. As kings, we are called to be humble kings like Jesus. A Christian king leads his people toward a life of virtue, God, and, ultimately, heaven. As flawed humans, it's easy in life to make mountains out of mole hills, to dig deep valleys when we dig in our heels and refuse to forgive one another. We harbor hurts that keep us locked in anger and resentment; that only makes the road of our journey rugged and harsh. We short-change our children when we neglect to teach them well by the way we live and keep the Gospel central to family life. It's a daily commitment we make to live the life of the King's kid.

We DO have the advantage of being on this side of the Jesus story. We have more cause to believe because our faith is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We are being called to prepare ourselves for the second coming of the Lord with the same gusto as John the Baptist's voice crying out in the desert: examine your conscience and repent, make your path straight, fill in those valleys, make low the mountains, release your sins to your compassionate and merciful Father in heaven.

We are blessed to have the Sacrament of Reconciliation to exchange shame, regret, and fear for an intimate embrace of forgiveness and a kiss of peace from God who calls us His beloved. Transformation begins when we clear the path by seeking forgiveness and reconciling ourselves with our Father in heaven and those we have hurt.