

Third Sunday of Advent (B)

December 11, 2011

A major actor in our Advent story is a man who many thought was a wizard. Thousands went off to see the strange prophet who preached and baptized in the wilderness around the Dead Sea. John ate, dressed and preached like no other man they had ever known. He was a man who dared to be different. The road that the pilgrims followed to get to John was no yellow brick road. The road was a dusty, bumpy trail. The only time that roads were ever smoothed and straightened in those days was when a king or conqueror was planning to visit his territory. Because John the Baptist believed strongly that the king of heaven was about to come into his territory, he told the people to “make straight the way of the Lord!”

John was such a wizard in convincing the people that the Messiah was near that even the cardinals and archbishops of his day were curious. And so they sent some monsignors to question the prophet. What is curious about John’s response is that he answers in the negative. He tells these religious leaders who he is not: “I am *not* the Messiah.” He also says that he is not Elijah, nor a prophet returned from the dead. He tells them that he is not a wizard but simply a voice crying out in the desert, daring to be different, daring to tell them that the Messiah was already in their midst.

It isn’t easy to dare to be *different* especially in this season of anxious preparation. There are powerful consumer forces that convince us to be *the same*. We need to have the toy, the perfume, the gadget that the newspaper and TV ads tell us *everybody* is going to get this Christmas.

That is why, here at Christ Our Hope Church, we choose to celebrate Advent with the universal church. We dare to be different. We dare to live **Gaudete Sunday**, the Sunday to rejoice, despite the many concrete signs of sadness that surround us. We dare to embrace simplicity when so many complicated demands are made on us. We dare not only to give gifts for those who have little. We give gifts to the One who comes in the poor and the needy in our midst.

The Josephinum and Catholic Housing Services and Catholic Community Services highlight the needs of many in our surrounding downtown neighborhood. Our gifts at Christ Our Hope are not for those who have, but for those who need.

The story of John the Baptist that we heard today tells of a man who dared to tell others that he was not a wizard but a man who was preparing for the coming of the wisest of them all. John is a good model for us this season to dare to be different.

To dare to be different in the mall, at the office party, on the freeway, with our neighbors, our friends, our families, strangers. To dare in joy and simplicity to bring our gifts to the One who comes!

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor