

Ok, we just heard, “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the Word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.” Now, that’s some introduction...

OK, so why does the writer of Luke’s Gospel go through all of that before finally getting to the point? – “...the Word of God came to John the son of Zechariah”. - John the Baptist, - John the bridge between the prophets of the Old Testament and the Good News of the New Testament. The writer also gave us this same sort of lengthy introduction when he wrote about Jesus’ birth. And, we do it too, actually for the same reason, every Sunday, when we mention Pontius Pilate as we pray the Nicene Creed. We do it to set Jesus the Christ, the Word made flesh, and His proclamation of the Good News of salvation into the context of human history. We do it because it marks the beginnings of the Kingdom of God.

Now, I said the beginnings. We know that the Kingdom is among us here and now, Jesus said so, but it’s not yet reached its fullness. So, once again, this Advent we find ourselves caught up in the tension of “already, but not yet”. In Advent, we prepare to celebrate Jesus’ coming as an infant - “Already”. And, at

the same time, our attention is also directed to the anticipation of Jesus' Second Coming at the end of time - "Not yet". Remember last Sunday's Gospel?

So, as we prepare for our celebration of Christmas, we are reminded that we are also to be about the building up of the Kingdom of God. Let's face it, Jesus said the Kingdom is at hand, but we know that there's still work to be done. We live a world where many paths remain crooked, many roads are winding, and we are certainly faced with our share of hills, mountains and valleys. We are faced with poverty and homelessness. We look around us and see violence, racism, sexism, and ageism. We see war and natural disasters. We see a growing number of people who dismiss faith and the presence of God in their lives as unnecessary. It certainly does appear that we have our work cut out for us. But still, we are to, as Isaiah says, "*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*"

In our first reading from Baruch we are told, "Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One... for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company." He's to the people of his time, and he's speaking to us.

And, Paul writes with words of encouragement, “I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.” God is with us, and he remains with us until Jesus comes again. So, - Already, but not yet... In the meantime, we are to bring hope to a weary world.

So, to paraphrase the writer of Luke’s Gospel: In the second year of the presidency of Donald Trump, when Eric Holcomb was governor of Indiana, and Joseph Hogsett was mayor of Indianapolis, during the pontificate of Pope Francis, when Charles Thompson was the Metropolitan of the Province of Indiana and Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, the Word of God has come to God’s Holy People – to each of us. And we are sent forth to proclaim a time of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and a time of reconciliation. To proclaim a season of mercy... To proclaim a season of hope...

We are to be voices crying out in the desert and to paraphrase Isaiah, *“Prepare the way of the Lord..” We are to make straight His paths. We are to fill the valleys of need in our world as we practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. We are to level the mountains and hills of intolerance and prejudice. We are to straighten the winding, and, yes sometimes twisted, roads of violence and immorality, and make smooth the rough ways of our society’s culture of death. We*

*are to bring hope. And, we are to do all of this so as to build up the Kingdom of God so that all shall see the salvation of God.*

It's a big job, but if we each begin right here, in our little corner of the world, together we can do it. I used to have a little purple button that I would dig out every Advent that said in large letters. "Jesus is coming!" Below that, in much smaller letters, it said "Look busy!" Well, it's time to do more than just look busy; it's time to get busy. Jesus is coming!