

## PREPARE YE THE WAY

“If, as Herod, we fill our lives with things; if we consider ourselves so important that we must fill every moment of our lives with action, when will we have the time to make the long, slow journey across the desert as did the Magi? Or brood over the coming of the child as did Mary? For each of us, there is a desert to travel. A star to discover. And a being within ourselves to bring to life.” (Author unknown).

Those of us who remember the rock opera *Godspell* may recall that it begins with a haunting solo sung by ‘John the Baptist’ as he stands on a busy street corner of a modern-day city: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” Each year, Advent also begins with the lonely voice of the Baptist crying out to us: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.” (Mt. 3: 1). Unfortunately, that deeply spiritual concept of the imminent birth of Jesus has been distorted by the cry – ‘You’d better watch out...Santa Claus is coming to town!’

There is no doubt that nostalgia and consumerism are eroding the true meaning of Christmas. We tend to spend more time in the shops, online and wrapping presents than we do preparing for the birth of Christ. The real message of Christmas is mostly forgotten. Maybe we should be looking at the state the world is in especially since experiencing the devastation of the Covid 19 pandemic and which is still dominating our lives.

Yes, Christmas decorations, the sharing of food and drink and the exchanging of gifts are all important parts of our celebrations. But they are not nearly as important as the spiritual gifts of love, patience, reconciliation, compassion, forgiveness and generosity. These gifts, which cost nothing, stand in sharp contrast to those offered to us merely materially. Christmas has to be celebrated from within. Christ has to become a reality in our lives. We need to take the time to slow down and look beyond the hype of the ‘eat, drink and be merry’ scenario.

And there is a way to do just this. Advent, the four weeks prior to Christmas, gives us the opportunity to discover the real meaning of the Incarnation. It invites us to experience the spiritual dimension which lies hidden behind the glitzy façade of toys, tinsel, cards, office parties, and commercialism, etc. Not everyone, of course, will want to respond. For many, the birth of Christ will slip by unnoticed in the dazzle and noise of sentiment and worldly cheer.

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Here in Australia, we have so much for which to be grateful. We live in a civilized country. We enjoy freedom of speech, democracy and religion. We do have our own set of problems but we also have many wonderful people and organizations which work tirelessly to tackle them.

However, despite our heroes, our possessions and wealth, we still seem to be, nevertheless, spiritually trapped and impoverished. Many are struggling to find real meaning in life. To whom then can they turn? Our politicians? The media? The Church? One can almost hear the universal sigh from the unbelievers, the cynics - 'get real!'

Whether Christian or not, we have to believe that there is hope for this grieving cosmos. There is an answer. It is not to be found in technology, science or power alone. The answer is really quite simple and has been with us for more than two thousand years. To survive in this fragile world, the Christmas story must be made relevant once again in our lives.

Christmas means that the Infant Child must find a home waiting for him in our hearts, in our families and in the society in which we live. As we prepare to celebrate his birth, let us listen to the wise words of Meister Eckhart urging us to 'be ready at all times for the gifts of God and always for new ones'.

This Christmas, may all of us who long for true peace in our lives be willing to share the priceless and lasting God-given gifts of unconditional love, forgiveness, second chances, comfort, encouragement, acceptance and sympathy with one another.

These are truly the gifts of the Magi.

A very happy, blessed, peaceful and joyful Christmas to all peoples.

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