

There was an article a few weeks ago about what we should do to be prepared for possible winter storms: flashlight with extra batteries, extra drinking water, food supplies, etc. The main emphasis was for us to be prepared in case a severe winter storm hits our region. Living in Southern California we would often get notices to remind us of what supplies we should have on hand in case of a major earthquake. I often wondered if people heeded the warnings or just hoped that the disaster would never come.

A question often heard over the past few weeks, “Are you ready for Christmas?” Now I know what people mean when they ask that question: “Have you bought my present yet?” Or, “Have you finished your shopping, baking, parties, etc.?” The focus is on the physical/material preparations we all make for Christmas. No one seems to be asking about our spiritual preparation for Christmas—in fact, it is probably the one aspect of Christmas that gets the least of our attention. So, is your heart ready for Christmas?

Advent is the time when we should be preparing to celebrate God’s greatest gift – Christ, Incarnate. Is not much of the Biblical history preparing the world for Christ’s coming? Biblical history tells of God preparing and choosing a people. It demonstrates how God loved a people, rescued and redeemed a people calling them to be witnesses to the world what a people who live under the love and grace of God should act and look like. The prophets spent much of their time reminding the people whose they were and how they should live and act under such leadership. The people, however, kept forgetting their role in God’s cosmic drama. They thought they were the main character in the story and they were not. The main character is and was, God.

John comes preparing the way for the One who is coming. He is not the one. He is not the light. He is not Elijah or the Prophet. He is the one who Isaiah says will come preparing the way for the One who is coming filled with the Spirit of God. The One on whom the Spirit of God will rest with power and majesty. The One who will bring justice and equality to the world. John is only the herald who prepares the way.

John is not the light. John is merely the reflection of the Light which is to come. He is the moon – Christ is the sun.

Now we know the moon has no light of its own. Were it not for the sun, the moon would just be a bleak, dark rock orbiting around another bleak dark rock in space. The songwriter was wrong when he wrote, “shine on, shine on harvest moon.” The moon only reflects the glory of the sun. Of course, “reflect on, reflect on harvest moon” probably would not have made such a great song. However, John understands that he is not the light; he is only reflecting the light which is to come. John is preparing the way to call the people back to God. Advent calls us to bring our attention back to God, the true Light.

John in a sense is saying, "He is, I am." John is only the reflection of God’s glory as we have said. Jesus is the Light of the World. He is what I am not. I come only to alert you to what is coming. He is our preparedness alert. He comes to prepare the way – to set the crooked road straight.

Looking from another perspective, Jesus uses the "I am" statement about himself in John’s Gospel. He uses the same phrasing that God uses when Moses asks the name of God at his encounter with the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). God responds to Moses, I AM THAT I AM or I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE. There is no one name that can encompass all that God is. There is no one statement that can contain all that God can be

or all that God is. Jesus is the Light coming into the world – he is not a reflection of the light but is the true Light. Jesus is the light of the world.

How do we spiritually prepare our hearts for Christmas? We are so busy making lists and checking them twice. There are so many things we have to do. Presents we have to buy. Decorations that must be put up. Cards to be sent. Cookies to bake. And every day someone adds something else to my list!!! We may want to shout “stop” I have all I can handle.

But what if we looked at things a little differently? What if as we addressed the cards we stopped for a moment and prayed for the ones receiving the card? What if as we baked the cookies, etc. we stopped for a moment and said a prayer for those who will be receiving and enjoying the product of our creativity? As we took a few moments to remember and pray, would not our hearts move closer to the true meaning of the season?

What if none of the traditional Christmas things happened? What if Santa went on strike? What if no Christmas decorations got put up? What if no cards were sent or no Christmas music played? What if there were no Charlie Brown Christmas special on TV? Would it still be Christmas?

Yes. Christmas is about the coming of Christ—God’s gift. Regardless of our celebrations or lack thereof, Christ still came as a babe in a manger in Bethlehem. Regardless of how we feel the angels still announced his birth to the shepherds on a hillside. Regardless of how we react the magi still saw a new star in the East and followed it to the place where the Christ child was. Regardless of what others would say, shepherds and magi fell at his feet and worshipped him. God’s love was demonstrated through his coming. The world was changed in a single moment. God so loved the world. This remains a constant whether we believe or not. This still happened whether we celebrate or not.

We don’t need snow to celebrate Christmas – although it looks like we might have a white Christmas this year! Only half of the world celebrates Christmas in the winter. The southern hemisphere is now enjoying summer. They celebrate Christmas during the warmest period of the year. We did not expect a “white Christmas” in the Philippines (although one of the most popular songs is, “I’m dreaming of a White Christmas)! It was palm trees, not fir trees, decorated with lights. Santa was much more comfortable in shorts than a warm red suit. However, none of these made any difference in what we were celebrating – God coming, God loving a world and its creation.

Advent reminds us of God’s redeeming love. It is a season we have adopted as a reminder of God’s coming. It is a time when we again marvel at the wonder of God’s love. He is the wonderful Counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace on whom the Spirit of God rested—bringing Good News to the Poor, – the great I AM. Advent reminds us that we belong to a family far bigger and wonderful than we can ever imagine. Christmas reminds us that He is and we are.

Like the magi and shepherds might we come to understand that God alone is worthy of our worship and praise. Let’s not get rid of the things that we so enjoy at this season—rather, let us transform them into our worship, prayer and celebration – let us, too – Come and adore him.