

John the Baptist prepares the way

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It's hard to believe, but the Christmas season is upon us again. People have repeatedly informed me that the older you get, the faster time goes by. No one warned me just how fast. So, ready or not, it is time to prepare for the holiday.

Most of us go through a period of preparing for Christmas. We hang decorations, put up Christmas trees, go to parties, visit Santa, and shop. In many Christian traditions the season of Advent leads up to the Christmas holiday.

The season of Advent covers the four Sundays before Christmas, and is a time of preparing ourselves spiritually for that important day.

□ Just as we prepare for Christmas now, God also was making plans to prepare His people for the coming of His son. Isaiah (Isaiah 40: 3 ESV) prophesies "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" The Gospels tell us that this prediction of one crying out is fulfilled in the ministry of John, a man we call The Baptist.

John arrives on the scene over 400 years after the last prophet of the Old Testament, and so he is the first in many generations to speak God's word to Israel. Surely many in Israel had decided that after 400 years God was no longer interested in them.

In those 400 years the Greeks had invaded and then tried to stamp out all traces of their faith and religious practice. They could look around and see that God's people were ruled by the Romans. They could easily have felt abandoned by God.

Often times when we look at our own lives we might think that God has abandoned us, too—our crops fail, our marriages fall apart, the kids don't act the way they should, a loved one gets sick, and maybe dies. And we wonder where God has gone and why He isn't answering our prayers. But John's arrival—and Christ's soon after—remind us that even when God has been silent, and we are waiting for His answers, He has not left us; you are not abandoned.

May the Christmas season remind you that God still has a plan, and is still at work, no matter how long it takes to see Him moving.