Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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"Thus says the Lord GOD: Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me" (Malachi 3:1).

Mal 3:1-4, 23-24; Lk 1:57-66

The idea of sending someone in advance to prepare for the arrival of an important person is used often in the Bible. Kings sent messengers ahead to announce their coming. The promise of the Messiah includes prophecies about the return of the Prophet Elijah. Jesus is preceded by John the Baptist, who is a figure like the one foretold by Isaiah, a "voice in the wilderness" who cries out, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

The miraculous birth of John to elderly parents is part of the Advent story, linked directly to the story of Mary's even more mysterious virginal conception of Jesus. She visits her cousin Elizabeth to help prepare for the birth of John. So, Mary is present when Zechariah regains his speech and proclaims his canticle of praise to God for keeping the promise to send the Messiah. Everyone is filled with wonder at the birth of this child, asking what it could mean.

The four weeks of Advent are meant to stir expectation, an important element in faith. To believe deeply in something, it helps us to experience a period of longing during which we come to know our needs and to focus our hopes on what only God can provide.

In an age of instant gratification, we can lose our capacity for anticipation and longing. Children who know they will get anything they want for Christmas are less likely to know how to wish or to how to react with wonder, gratitude and joy when what they have had to wait for patiently finally arrives.

Because Christmas can easily become just another civic holiday, our preparation is all the more important. Advent gradually issues the invitation in the Scriptures and in the liturgy to open our lives to God's presence among us. Something wonderful is about to happen, and the more we anticipate it, the greater our encounter will be with Jesus, who is coming to give us more than we can ever ask for or imagine.