

Be a messenger of the good news -- prepare away for the Lord to re enter into the lives of his people. Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist is one of my favorite characters in the bible. He is a wonderful character of courage and hope. When I last went to the holy land, I wanted to gain an understanding of this man, John and his role. My study group went down to the River Jordan, where John had been preached. Even today, it still is a bare barren wilderness. The place where this message was preached was the river crossing, where centuries before the Israelite people passed through the river from their exile in Egypt to return to the promised land. It was a symbolic place of return. It was also a place of life. People came from the surrounding area to draw water from the river of life. The town of Jericho sprang up next to this crossing place. (Show on map) .

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, John, cousin of Jesus, courageously called out to the people at the river - turn back to God. These people knew about God, but many of them had wandered off from the practice of their faith. John appealed to them -- Open your hearts to receive God's Spirit anew. Hear what God has to say. Hear the voice that speaks of peace. The Lord wants nobody to be lost. Prepare a way in your hearts, for God to re-enter them . God wants to bring justice in your lives, for God is like a shepherd. He wants to gather you into his arms. John was a messenger , and Jesus and others continued this mission from God.

John recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah, in his message. That message was given to the people of Israel in exile in Babylon, years before, where they were experiencing another wilderness. Isaiah was wanting to offer them hope. He was wanting to show them that God would deliver them from their distress. And of course they did return. They would have crossed back into the land of Israel, at this very spot where John was preaching.

John reminded the people of the many things God had done for them, and as a result of his invitation, many did return and come to accept and live out the good news of God that was proclaimed and lived out by Jesus .

Last Sunday, a modern day John renewed the call of his predecessor. In his advent message to us , ABJB said : Let us make a fresh start in spreading our faith through our archdiocese. Let us reach out to the world with enthusiasm; let us all participate in the mission of the Church. Let us unleash the energy of all Catholics for mission. Let us come alive with the fullness of life , promised to us by Jesus in the Gospel of John, when he says, I have come to bring you life and life in all its fullness. Let us see the reign and kingdom of God that surrounds us. Let us share the good news with other people. Let us use the year 2009 as a type of extended advent of the for the coming of Christ to this archdiocese. Help us to embrace a theology of Jesus Communion and Mission and share that with all those people whom we encounter in our daily lives.

I'm excited by that . I'm inspired by that. We have around us. People living in a modern day wilderness, a wilderness of anxiety, a wilderness of loneliness , a wilderness of uncertainty. The people of St. John's Wood and the gap have been traumatized by the storm damage. Many struggle with the financial losses of the world recession. We see a

world afflicted by terrorism and, instability. It is a scary time for those who do not have a hope.

But we can have hope. We know that the life of Christ can come into any darkness, any wilderness that we find ourselves in. The Holy Spirit can transform our hearts and sustain us in times of difficulty. As we keep coming here every week, and hearing God story, we are reminded that God always provides for us. We can face any challenge. But the majority of the people living in this suburb don't live lives reminded of that hope. Most of them know that God exists - more than a third of them have been baptized in the Catholic tradition. But for a range of reasons, they are not experiencing the fullness of life that Jesus offers.

And so we are called to be messengers of this Good news to them. We are called to prepare a way for God to re-enter their lives, and we are called to offer them a connection to a life renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As you read from Fr Ray's message in the bulletin today, you will see that one of the steps we are planning to take is to offer them an invitation to come and celebrate with us at the Christmas masses. We want them to experience anew our community. We've printed 8 thousand Christmas cards that we would invite you to give out. We have already posted out invitations to all the families that participated in our sacramental programs. But the invitation with the most likely chance of some positive response will be the invitation given in person.

We would ask each of you to take a number of these Christmas cards home with you. Use them as a tool to personally invite people to come and share with us this Christmas. You will see in the bulletin, some suggested words you might use if you weren't sure of what to say. I'm going to a Christmas party tonight and I'm going to offer an invitation to everyone there. I'm just going to simply say to them, after I have gotten to know them, a polite invitation to come and celebrate with us at Christmas. We have a wonderful welcoming community, and I can guarantee your experience of a worship a positive one. You are most welcome. We would invite you to keep inviting people right up to Christmas, in person.

So that no one in our community misses out on an invitation, we would invite you to take responsibility for giving out invitations in your street. Outside Mass, on a team from our connections group will be making additional cards available, and will have maps where you can indicate a street that you would accept responsibility for handing out invitation cards to. Again, personal invitation is going to be the best way to get a response. But if that does not present itself as an option for you, then a simple letterbox drop would also be appropriate. It might be that some people end up receiving three invitations to come to Christmas. Research would tell us that most people need three invitations to respond to anything new or different in their lives things. We've got plenty of cards.

Has anyone got any questions about this.

Jesus calls us- Be a messenger of the good news -- prepare a way for the Lord to re enter into the lives of his people. We have great news to share. We have a great community to welcome people to. We have the Holy Spirit, ready stirring the hearts of the people that God will present before us. We are messengers, and there is someone who is following us. Someone is more powerful, who will complete this mission.

Now isn't that good news. Tell a person beside you, that is the best news - and I need to share it .