

Miracles - Second Sunday of Advent

Miracles are wonderful things, not magical, but certainly they are wonderful, unexpected, hoped for, miraculous. The fact is, they really happen: The Bible tells us miracles are real. God created the universe, designed this world and setup the laws of nature. He loves us so he created order out of chaos. God sustains this creation and supports this order. Except...every once in a while he doesn't. He just takes the laws of nature/ of probability/ of physics/ and upends them. And he does it to help us out, to get our attention, to move us to deeper faith and commitment, to just help us understand more of his plan. That's what happened at Christmas. The first Christmas was a miracle. Actually, it was a series of miracles. Lots of them.

During this season, I invite you to do two things: one thing for yourself and one thing for someone else. For someone else, consider who you know who needs to hear this message this Christmas; plug them into it, from joining here in person, on line, or inviting them to Mass on Christmas Eve. For yourself I asked you to think of a miracle that you could expect this Christmas. Last week we made paper angels available, we're calling them miracle angels. Write on one, that miracle you desire, if you haven't already, then we pray over them in the time between now and Christmas. Before every miracle, there is a problem, a storm, that needs to be overcome. In fact, the problem helps us to know we need a miracle, that we need God to come through in some way. If there wasn't a storm, if life were easy then a miracle wouldn't be needed. Problems and difficult situations are the breeding grounds for miracles.

In every miracle we see in the Bible, God does something. God acts, but he does not act alone. He acts after human beings do something. If we want to see a miracle in our life, if we want to see wonderful things happen, we have a role to play. What do you need to do, if you want a Christmas miracle?

Lets look at todays gospel. Luke tells us that John, who we know as The Baptist received the word of God:

He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance

- A not uncommon practice Toward the end of the Old Testament period the practice of immersion as a sign of sorrow for sin, and John seems to have taken up that idea and amplified it as something everyone should do. Repentance begins with sorrow and sadness for sin or failure. Those aren't necessarily positive emotions in the beginning but the Bible tells us over and over again that sorrow is the beginning of conversion. It's never much fun at first, but sorrow for our sin can lead to positive life change. You have had that experience before. There are some things you have changed but first you had to experience sorrow. You maybe only began to work out or exercise because you

didn't like the way you were feeling. You only started studying and working at school because you were sorry for the grades you were getting. You only got your house in order because you were sick and sorry to live in chaos. Most of us don't change until we experience some kind of sorrow for something we want to change.

Whatever miracle you are looking for this Christmas, there is probably a bit of sorrow in your heart that things are the way they are. The sorrow leads us to desire change. Repentance is a specific kind of sorrow. It is a sorrow in how we have added to the problem. Repentance takes some responsibility in saying, "I am sorry that I have been part of this problem in some way and owning the problem if even in a small way."

- Maybe the miracle you are praying for is about your marriage. Repentance begins by saying, "I own the fact that I have caused problems in this marriage and I am owning my failings." Maybe you are saddened that two family members don't get along. Repentance is acknowledging that maybe you have unintentionally stoked that fire, that maybe you have gotten some satisfaction about being in the middle. If you have some health issues, maybe it is acknowledging that you haven't always taken care of yourself. If a family member has bad habits, is drinking too much, maybe repentance might look like an acknowledgement that you have enabled them.

Repentance is an acknowledgement that we are part of the problem, feeling the sadness about it and desiring to change.

John shares what else we need to do, he's quoting Isaiah: "*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*" In other words, do something to prepare for God to do something. And John communicates this instruction with some sense of urgency, as in, the time is now. If you want a miracle if you want to see some wonderful things this Christmas, get rid of the obstacles that are keeping God from intervening in your life. So what keeps God from intervening? Dishonesty and deceit; injustice, intolerance, ingratitude; bitterness, anger, envy or pride; gossip, lying, lust, laziness, basically anything that dishonors God. Preparing the way for a miracle means taking action and removing those things that get in the way. You can't expect God to act and do a wonderful thing in your finances if you are still digging a deeper hole of debt. You can't expect God to work a miracle in your family if you gossip about the other family members. You can't expect God to heal your marriage if you keep putting down your spouse in front of others. You can't expect God to bring a wonderful person into your life if you keep spending all your free time looking at junk on the internet. In whatever area this Christmas you want a miracle, you need to prepare the way for God to act by removing some kind of sin from your life. You don't have to remove all of it. You can't all on your own anyway. You can't do everything, especially if you're talking about a big thing, but you can do something. John says you go ahead and *Prepare the way*.

You do what you can...and then look what happens:

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways be made smooth.

- That's not something we do. That's what God does. Maybe the miracle you need is like a valley, you need it filled in. Maybe the problem you've got going on is like an unscalable mountain...maybe it's a twisted crooked maze you'll never find your way through, a rough tough place to be that you can't even take anymore. You do what you can do and let God do what only God can do.

Prepare the way for God to work the miracle you need. Here's John's promise

Then all flesh will see God's salvation.

- Salvation is being saved, it's something you can not do on your own. It's a recognition of hurt and you need someone bigger and stronger or of greater means to come and bail you out. And who is this a promise for? All flesh, everyone. Every single person. This means if you have gone to Church all your life or back in Church for the first time. If you are straight or gay, if you are man or woman, if you are a Republican, Democrat, whoever you are, God wants to do a miracle in your life, wants to do a wonderful thing, this Christmas. So why not do your part in the week ahead, with a certain sense of urgency. Don't wait. Prepare the way for God and you will see his hand on your life. So how do you prepare the way for God? You take the next step you know you're supposed to take. In light of the miracle you want this Christmas, you remove the obstacles, the sins that keep God from moving in your life. What step you take is going to depend on who you are. My guess is that as I was talking, something came to mind. You know there is something that you can remove from your habits or your behavior to prepare the way for God to move. You may know there is something in your life that makes it hard for you to go to God and ask for help. The obstacle you remove, doesn't have to be big. It could be very small. It may even in some ways be symbolic. If you read on in the chapter, people ask John what they should do to prepare the way and John tells them to do very practical things.
- He told rich people, "give to the poor" He told tax collectors, "stop cheating people" He told soldiers, "defend the defenseless"
- *Prepare the way:* You want to see a miracle this Christmas, prepare the way AND EXPECT A MIRACLE TO HAPPEN