

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*

Caesar the emperor, Pilate the governor, Herod, ruler, king of Galilee, Annas, Caiaphas, powerful religious leaders, and John.

When the almighty God chose one to speak, to prepare, John was the one. Not the emperor in Rome nor the governor in Jerusalem but John in the wilderness. John would smooth the path for the king of king and Lord of lords. John would call the people down off their high horses, sending them to their knees before the one whom God was sending. For all flesh would see the salvation of God.

Lately I have been wondering how our children will ever understand all of this. Every time they turn on the radio or hear the news they will learn that the really important question in this season is "Will the shoppers open up their pocketbooks?" How will Christmas affect the economy? Will it bring health and more jobs? Prosperity? Money, lots of money, that is the kind of salvation we can all understand.

A few weeks ago our children were being bombarded with talk of Saddam Hussein - chemical weapons - biological weapons - would President Clinton be able to slow the production of these, buy us a little more time before we will be afraid to go anywhere do anything for fear of what a terrorist might spring upon us?

Many weeks ago the markets took a plunge. Maybe you checked the financial pages to see how much you were losing. How will our children ever understand what the coming of the Lord means when all the news never mentions him at all?

Maybe you were here last week when I asked a child, "Whom are we waiting for?" Since I had just told them the answer I got the right answer returned to me, "Jesus." But then the same boy added, "But I am waiting for Santa Claus too."

Aren't we all? If Christmas sales are good and a stocks do well life is going to be a lot easier. And if world leaders can keep biological weapons far from the streets of Cleveland, or Lorain think of the suffering that we will be spared.

So what the Emperor Tiberius was doing and what Pontius Pilate was doing and Herod was doing and Caiaphas and Annas, the religious leaders were doing, how great was their effect on the whole life of the people. But we must tell our children what the one whom John announced will mean for them, right now in this world, what he means for them.

More than the stock market? Yes.

More than safety in the streets? Yes.

More than days of prosperity? Yes.

The one whose way John prepared has brought people in this very room through great valleys of grief and gave them laughter once more.

The one whose way John prepared has enabled people to survive sexual abuse, even rape, and to be whole and at peace once more.

The one whose way John prepared has enabled some to have great wealth and not to be owned by it as so many are.

The one whose way John prepared has taught some who were poor of their riches in him.

A few weeks ago I asked some questions of my confirmation students using the word real. Which is more real, the world of politics or the rule and authority of Jesus?

Every day your life is an answer to that question for you.

But John was so bold to believe that God was Lord even over Herod, the king. John was executed by Herod.

Jesus believed that the authority given to him by the Father was greater than the authority of Pontius Pilate. Jesus was executed by Pontius Pilate.

How can we help our children understand that Herod and Pilate are only remembered in this day by those who believe that Jesus is at the right hand of God, ruling now and forever?

How can we help our children understand that the child born of Mary is Lord over all presidents and governors and stock markets and terrorists?

Trust in him, live for him. Our children will see.

Prepare the way of the Lord.

