

John announce the coming of the Lord. A path must be prepared for the one who brings salvation. It's almost as if the people who heard John's message wanted to know what it meant in practice: how do we smooth and straighten our lives into a welcoming highway for the Lord? Today we hear John's answer. We can make our hearts ready to receive Christ by sharing what we have with those who have nothing and by treating others with fairness and respect. Jesus will reveal God's love to us. Our faith-response to that loving presence requires that we act according to the ways of justice and always with the greatest kindness and charity.

How we behave towards others is a measure of how deeply we have welcomed Christ into our hearts. But, as well as reflecting on what we do, we are also invited to think about the spirit in which we act. Zephaniah speaks of the joy that proclaims God's presence among us. St Paul invites his hearers always to be happy in the Lord. It's one thing to share what we have begrudgingly or out of duty; it's another thing completely to do so happily and joyfully.

Application

Advent is a time of waiting in joyful hope. We are looking forward to celebrating the fulfilment of God's promise. It's a time of thankfulness for God's generous love, made real for us in Jesus. John the Baptist knew that this love was a free and undeserved gift. He was not even worthy to bend low and undo Christ's sandals. We do not have to be worthy to welcome Jesus, but we are called to be willing to let his presence change our attitudes and behaviour.

The Gospel shows us what this means in practice. Whatever shape they take, genuine Christian generosity and kindness will always be expressed with happiness and joy. We rejoice in God's gifts to us; let's also be joyful in happily sharing them with others.