

Well, we all know that Santa is a very busy man this time of year, lots of stops to make. Last Saturday, he had breakfast with us and tomorrow/today at 2:00 pm, he will appear in the Amelia parade. But once in a while, Santa gets in a bind, he just can't do it all, and he needs some help. So, once in a while some man puts on a Santa suit, stuffs some pillows underneath, ties on that long beard--and he pretends to be Santa. And the little kids shout, "Santa! Santa!" and he says to himself, "if they only knew. I'm not Santa; I'm just an ordinary person. I can't do all the things that Santa can do!"

So, a terrific way to prepare for Christmas--the birth of Christ--is to figure out who we really are--and of course who we are not.

"John the Baptist, who are you!" "Well, I am sure as heck not the Christ, not the Messiah!" We are ready for Christmas when we know, really know, that we are not the Christ, that we are not God, that we need help. We need a Savior.

The person filing for unemployment knows this. The patient in chemotherapy knows this. The woman at her first twelve-step group knows this. A man struggling to begin his Confession knows this.

Perhaps St. Bernadette Parish also learned that we are not the Christ. Fifty years of trying to build a new church, one plan after another. I arrived in July 2005 ("the Messiah is here!!!") looked around and said, "We can build a new church! People want it, and we only need \$2 mill! This won't be that hard! Put those

thermometers up, and get out lots of paint!” For awhile, the money for a new church flowed in. And then it slowed down. Time began to go by. And then the gifts pretty much stopped. And the thermometers didn’t budge.

And then I had the most amazing awareness: I realized that I am not the Christ! “Lord, I can’t make this happen! Our parish can’t build this alone! We need help!” When we fail, when we fall down--that’s the moment when we are ready for grace, ready for Christ, ready for Christmas. Jesus comes the empty manger, to the needy and broken--not to the proud and self-satisfied.

Parishioners continued to pray the Capital Campaign Prayer. As a parish, I think we realized we needed Jesus as never before--that the very existence of the parish was at stake, that we needed Christ to come to us. A group of us make a pilgrimage to Lourdes, the home of St. Bernadette, pray the Campaign Prayer and cry out, “St. Bernadette, pray for us!” Seventeen days later, we are given permission to build. And God continues to be good to us: Friday’s mail brought an unexpected donation toward our new church--a gift of \$250,000.00. The donor wishes to remain anonymous.

So, this weekend, you and I are witnesses--like Isaiah, like John the Baptist. We announce a year of favor from the Lord, that God has not abandoned his people. With John the Baptist, the people of this parish can announce, “There really is One among you, even if you do not recognize Him.” Even if your personal life is dark and rough, Christ is in your midst.