Three ways to prepare for Christ's coming

By Father Albert Shamon
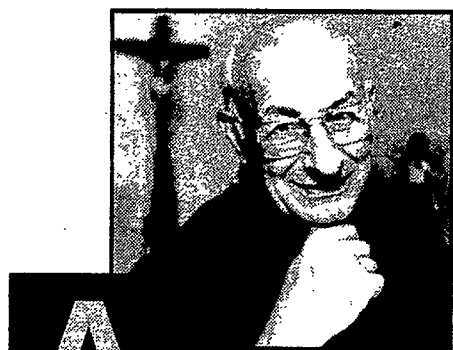Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 3:10-18; (R1) Zephaniah 3:14-18; (R2) Philippians 4:4-7.

Sunday's Gospel centers on John the Baptist. John pointed out three ways to prepare for the coming of Christ.

The first way was, if you have wealth, share it. John said to the crowds, "If you have two coats, share with the man who has none. The man who has food should do the same."

Christmas is a time of sharing. We exchange gifts, but many of us will go beyond that. While some of us drop money into Salvation Army kettles, others will make an end-of-the-year contribution to our parish church. Something about this season helps us see beyond ourselves to others' needs.

Of course, not everyone is able to give to others this year. One man wrote to the Thanksgiving Appeal: "Dear Father, it's almost impossible for me to contribute this year. My financial condition has been shattered by federal laws, state laws, county laws, mother-in-laws, brother-in-laws, and outlaws. I am required to get a dog li-

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cense, business license, not to mention a marriage license. For my own safety I am also required to carry life insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, accident insurance, burglar insurance, unemployment insurance, fire insurance. Something unexpected happened: my dog had pups. I sold them, and here's the money."

I guess we all feel that way at times, especially during this season when the demands for money come in from all

sides. Yet Christ comes into our lives bringing us unmerited love. Our enjoyment of Christmas will be proportional to the joy we bring to others. If you have wealth, share it.

John's second prescription for preparing for Christ's coming: if you are in a position of trust, honor it. John said to tax-collectors, "Collect no more than is appointed you."

In our Lord's time, tax collectors were despised as collaborators with Rome. They were also infamous for their lack of ethics. They would add extra fees that generally made them quite prosperous. John did not tell them to give up their jobs. What he told them was to be honest in their work.

Something scary is happening in America today. We have replaced absolute principles of conduct with moral relativism. In an article titled, "Ethics Without Virtue," Christina Sommers noted that students taking college ethics classes debate abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, DNA research, and the ethics of transplant surgery, while they learn almost nothing about private decency, honesty, personal responsibility, or honor.

We cannot have a society that is not

built on honesty and trust. If you have a position of trust — whether it is in business, government, church or within your own home as parents — honor it.

Here is John's final way: if you have power, don't abuse it. He said to soldiers, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation. Be content with your pay."

The Herods are a tragic example of the abuse of power. The Herod under whom Christ was born was an exceptionally able ruler. History calls him "Herod the Great."

But he became a paranoid. He killed so many of his own sons that Augustus Caesar, punning on the Greek words for pig and son, said: "I'd rather be Herod's pig *(hueios)* than his son *(huios).*" He slaughtered the holy innocents of Bethlehem.

Meanwhile, his son Herod Antipas executed John the Baptist when John pointed out Herod's moral failures.

So, how do we prepare for Christmas? John tells us plainly: share your wealth, be honest and trustworthy, and don't abuse power. Follow the example of Christ. He had it all, but he gave it all up because of his love for you and me.