

Finding Our Potential Third Week of Advent Final Days of Advent Saturday,
December 23, 2017 8:15 AM **Mal 3:1-4, 23-24;** **Lk 1:57-66** (We all have a gift, but
we have to discover what the gift is and then follow through.)

“But they answered her, ‘There is no one among your relatives who has this name.’”

One of the most common elements **in ancient societies was the passing down of names and occupations.** Jesus it is assumed practiced the art of carpentry, not necessarily modern carpentry but making wooden wheels for example for carts. Why? Because Joseph is called in Greek *teknon*, so workman, carpenter, and it is assumed Jesus did the same thing because that’s what people did. **People followed in the footsteps of their parents.** Boys followed the role of their fathers, and girls followed the role of their mothers, for women it was usually mothering itself and caring for the family.

Now the whole point here is that John is not to be a priest like his father. **John is not to follow the tradition that he is born into.** John is chosen by God for a very special task, which is already described by Malachi, although it took some time before people figured this out. But when Malachi says, “Elisha will return,” or “The spirit of Elijah will return,” that refers to the work and the ministry and the prophecy of John the Baptist. **So he gets a new name, a new name because he has a new role, a new vocation, a new place to serve God.**

Now **in modern times** of course people make up all kinds of crazy names, so this is kind of going the opposite direction. **It’s almost like there is absolutely no continuity between generations.** Every new child is regarded as something beginning all anew and that the child can do whatever he or she wants. And this is actually one of the ideas that our culture promotes. **You can do whatever you want. Well not really, you can do whatever you can. We are born with a certain potential.** John the Baptist had a certain potential. He had a certain gift God gave him for proclaiming the way of the Lord, for preparing the way of the Messiah. That was his gift.

We all have a gift, but we have to discover what the gift is and then follow through. I believe there are many unhappy people in the world because they never recognize they have a gift. Rather they spend their lives trying to do whatever pleases them. That's different. **This is not about pleasing oneself; it's about serving God. That's the way to happiness.** People are very unhappy and very, as it were, out of sorts because they never find who God has called them to be, while they're always trying to make up something that seems pleasing, or that seems will fit. There is always a certain amount of anxiety and desperation in all that. **God really wants everyone to have a very healthy, prosperous life in service of the kingdom of God.** And it doesn't really matter whether our role is prominent or not, whether we are recognized or not, whether we become important in the eyes of others or not. **We are all important in the eyes of God,** and that's all that matters, that **we do what we can do, and we do it with grace and devotion.** And the result will be the fruit of the Spirit.