

## John the Baptist Prepares the Way

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup> As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, <sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’ ” <sup>4</sup> John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>5</sup> And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

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I greet you with, grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit who lives within us as believers, empowering us.

We are in the Second Sunday in Advent, a time of preparation, rejoicing and proclaiming the birth of the only true Savior, Jesus, who entered our world in human form to die for our sins. In our gospel lesson from Mark, our attention is on John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Jesus just as the prophets had spoken. Are we to be prepared? Are we to proclaim? Is God calling to you? May we hear His good news.

### *THE FOUR GOSPELS*

The good news of Jesus is recorded in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Bible. But, why have four? Why not just make one, with all the details. Imagine, that you were judge hearing testimony from four witnesses about a series of events and each had exactly the same details you would probably conclude that they had gotten together, checked the story, and agreed on what to tell. But if each testimony has some parts the same, and other aspects that included additional components, different perspectives of the same story, the testimony would be more credible. In the wisdom of the Holy Spirit we have four gospels that tell of the good news of the gospel of Jesus, each similar yet different, giving a different perspective and a different target audience. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels, or synopsis of the life of Christ. They portray the miracles, parables and addresses, where John includes deeper more abstract discourses, conversations, prayers, more in meditation and communion as compared to the actions in the first three. Yet even in Matthew, Mark and Luke, while more similar to each other than to John, each is also very different. In Matthew, Jesus is the King, the Messiah, many Old Testament references, with an appeal to the Jewish mind, the Old Testament fulfilled in Jesus, keeping with what they knew from God’s word. Jesus is the promised one, while in Mark, Jesus is the Perfect Servant, more about deeds than proving who He is, appealing to the Roman practical mind. In Luke, Jesus is Son of Man, appealing to the Greek world, many

details about the humanity of Jesus, absent from the others. John portrays the deity of Jesus, in John there is no genealogy, or about his birth, boyhood, temptation, transfiguration, no appointing of the disciples, no parables, no ascension or great commission. In John Jesus is called the Word, which is God's name, Jesus is creator, the only begotten of the Father, Lamb of God, and the I Am's, a name of God, the theological discourses, and the high priestly prayer, and others unique to John. You read and study all four and you continue to deepen in your understanding of who Jesus really is, as your faith grows.

Today we hear from the Holy Spirit, through Mark. Mark is the shortest of all the gospels, very distinct and to the point. There is nothing about the virgin birth, nor any reference to his birth, no one is interested in the genealogy of a servant. There is no visit of the wise men, no account of Jesus as a boy, it is Christ the Man. There is no sermon on the mount, the only reference to the prophets is in our lesson today. No divine titles in Mark. Jesus is not recorded as king except in derision. Matthew records Jesus as Immanuel, God with us, not so in Mark. Mark calls Jesus master, while other the gospel writers, Lord. Mark has no introduction, as he begins proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. That word gospel, appears 4 times Matthew, 4 times in Luke, only once in John, but 10 times in Mark. In Matthew many parables, only 4 in Mark, yet Mark emphasizes the miracles of Jesus more than the others. So, we look at our lesson from Mark.

### *THE GOSPEL*

Mark opens his gospel, with a precise statement of why he writes. This is the gospel, the good news, good news of salvation from Jesus. The name Jesus, is taken from the Greek word of the Hebrew Joshua, which means The LORD is salvation. Christ is a title, the equivalent of the Hebrew word for Messiah. Son of God an affirmation of the deity of Jesus, that He is God. So here is Jesus, the Lord of salvation, the promised Messiah, God with us.

### *JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD TO PREPARE*

Mark then moves to the first event, John the Baptist preaching, skipping anything before that. All the gospel writers tell of John, yet tell of different aspects. (Matt 3:1-11; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:3-16; John 1:19-34) This is John the Baptist, foretold by the prophets. Jesus in Matthew 11 indicates the 'messenger' is John the Baptist, just like is found here in Mark. (Mat 11:10) The identification as 'messenger' is found in Malachi 3 verse 1, and John as the 'voice' in Isaiah 40 verse 3. Some manuscripts have simply the word prophets rather than Isaiah. In any event, Mark simply left off Malachi, or Isaiah as the first includes Malachi, or Isaiah also spoke of this and it just was not recorded. What is important is John is the fulfillment, "**Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,** (Mark 1:2, Mal 3:1), and also this is <sup>3</sup> **the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'**" (Mark 1:3, Isaiah 40:3) In ancient times before the arrival of the King, his envoys would travel ahead of him, preparing the

way. They would make sure the roads were safe, clear of obstacles and would announce the coming arrival of the King. This ‘prepare the way of the Lord’ is not a physical clearing of obstacles, but a clearing in the hearts of obstacles that keep people from the King. This was to be a time of spiritual preparation. That same call is happening today. God has sent His messenger to you. We hear the call in scripture, in the word of God, as that word is heard, is read, is proclaimed, is sung, reaching hearts and minds. Are you listening?

### *A MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE*

Mark tells us, <sup>4</sup> **John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** <sup>5</sup> **And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.** (Mark 1:4-5) There is a call to repentance. Matthew records John saying, <sup>2</sup> **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** Matt 3:2 (ESV) Another words the kingdom is upon us, do not wait, it is urgent that you do not delay, take action, less you miss the coming kingdom, the final days are upon us. In repentance there is a turning, it means to be converted. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus called the same way, saying in Matthew 4, <sup>17</sup> **From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** Matt 4:17 (ESV) You see and recognize sin. There is regret, a sorrow over sin, but a godly sorrow, not a worldly remorse, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, <sup>10</sup> **For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.** 2 Cor 7:10 (ESV) There is a conversion, a new heart, and life of living in the repentance that God brings, living in His power. Matthew records of John, <sup>67</sup> **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.** Matt 3:7-8 (ESV) True conversion brings eternal life and a changed life right now. This way of salvation, of repentance is open for all to receive, apart from merit, or work, as it says in Ephesians, <sup>8</sup> **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Eph 2:8-10 (ESV) and then what results, the very next verse, <sup>10</sup> **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** Eph 2:8-10 (ESV) Are you prepared? Have you heard the call of repentance to receive the finished work of Christ and to live in His power. Be His messenger. May God indeed grant this to us all.

In His name we pray, AMEN. May the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.