**10/12/2023 Mark 1:1-8 Advent 2**

These are the first words from St Mark’s Gospel:

* **The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**
* **As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
  ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
     who will prepare your way;  
  the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
     “Prepare the way of the Lord,  
     make his paths straight” ’,**

**John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness…**

* There’s no infancy narrative as in Matthew and Luke
* So: no angel Gabriel as in Luke
* No wise men as in Matthew.
* There’s also no grand sweep of the cosmos
* As we get in John, where we hear that all things were made
* Through the word, and that the word became flesh.
* No: we go straight into the middle of the action
* With Jesus an adult, and with John preparing his way.

Notice up front that St Mark is writing ‘good news’

* The great announcement of what God has done
* He says up front that Jesus is the Christ
* The Messiah: as St Peter will confess at the centre of the book
* He says up front that Jesus is the Son of God
* As the centurion will confess at the cross.
* Today I’m proclaiming good news from God’s word:
* Jesus is the one washes us with the Holy Spirit
* So that our repentance is not simply turning away from sin
* But receiving forgiveness in his name
* And sharing this forgiveness with others.

So: in Mark we hear words from the Old Testament

* That God had promised to send a messenger
* To prepare the way for his Son.
* And this messenger is John the Baptist
* Who had been given a mission by God.
* This is what the text says: **John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**
* The wilderness: the place of wandering, of repentance
* Of preparation of entering into the promised land.
* John proclaims a baptism: a washing.

This is not the baptism that Jesus instituted

* So, in Acts 19 we read this: **While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?’ They replied, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ Then he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They answered, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— altogether there were about twelve of them.** Acts 19:1-7
* So: John’s baptism, his washing was one of preparation.
* The gift of the Spirit comes through Jesus:
* Through the washing that he instituted
* Through prayer in his name.

And this is what happened:

* **And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.**
* The people come to him to *the Jordan*:
* The threshold of entry into the promised land.
* They confessed their sins: admitted their need before God
* And they were washed in the river itself
* Marking their new entry into the land.

The role of John as preparer is underlined

* By the description of him: **Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.**
* If you go back to 2 Kings 1 you’ll hear
* That this is how Elijah is described
* And if you go to the prophet Malachi,
* You will read that the prophet identifies the one
* Who will prepare the way of the Lord with *Elijah*
* This is what he writes
* It is the very last verse of our Old Testament:
* **Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.**
* So, Jesus does not come out of the blue
* He is long-expected, and his way is prepared by John:
* By the Elijah who is the messenger

As a true messenger, John does not proclaim himself, but Jesus:

* [**John] proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.**
* He is lower than a slave in relation to Jesus
* And he says: **I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’**
* It is with Jesus that repentance will reach its goal:
* Not simply acknowledging that we have sinned
* Or being sorry that we have sinned
* Or looking forward to the gift of forgiveness
* But by being forgiven in Jesus’ name.
* There is real power here, that we can experience here and now:
* As we hear the word of forgiveness in Jesus’ name
* And as we trust that we are indeed forgiven
* *And as we forgive others*:

This is something than we can try out:

* Since we have been forgiven by God in Christ Jesus
* We do not have to hold on to anger and hurt and bitterness
* *We are free to forgive others as God has forgiven us.*
* This is a real work of the Holy Spirit.
* So, in real life, with flesh and blood people
* We can experience that the Holy Spirit is not an idea or a concept,
* But the helper, the advocate, the counsellor
* Who empowers us to live in a new way.

Jesus is the Christ: the anointed Son of David

* Who reigns as our true king.
* He is the Son of God
* Who bore our sins on the cross.
* He is the one who baptises us with his Spirit
* And frees us to live in his light.
* In Jesus’ name. Amen.