



IN THE DESERT

Dec. 6, 2021 Mk. 1:1-8. Is 40:1-11. Second Sunday of Advent

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#### ENTERING THE SCENE:

Each Advent we are invited to slip into our inner quiet and prepare for the "way of the Lord." Crowds went out to hear John the Baptist because they were desperate for some good news. If a modern day John the Baptist appeared on the scene today, one wonders how big an audience he would get. Each age encounters its own version of oppression and woe. We certainly live in anxious times. Making a straight path for the coming of the Lord might be taking on a deeper meaning because of the world conditions. Let us each take time to be very honest with ourselves and others so as to open our hearts to whatever God is wanting to bring to us in this preparation time.

#### Mk. 1:1-8

1 The beginning of the **gospel** about Jesus Christ, the **Son of God.** 2 It is written in **Isaiah** the prophet: "I will send my **messenger** ahead of you, who will **prepare** your way" 3 a **voice** of one **calling** in the **desert**, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make **straight** paths for him.'" 4 And so **John** came, **baptizing** in the **desert**

region and **preaching** a **baptism** of **repentance** for the **forgiveness** of **sins.** 5 The whole **Judean** countryside and all the people of **Jerusalem** went out to him. **Confessing** their **sins**, they were **baptized** by him in the **Jordan** River. 6 **John** wore clothing made of **camel's hair**, with a **leather belt** around his waist, and he ate **locusts** and **wild honey.** 7 And this was his **message**: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose **sandals** I am not **worthy** to stoop down and untie. 8 I **baptize** you with **water**, but he will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit.**"

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Mark begins his gospel telling us that Jesus is the Son of God and spends the rest of his gospel telling us how that happened. What best prepares you this Advent for "the way of the Lord?"

**PRAYER:** Lord, I once again begin to deepen my preparations for the good news that John the Baptist proclaims in this text. His message of repentance rings as true for me as it must have for those around him all those many years ago. He invites me to examine my choices and present myself once again for a renewed and deepened commitment. Help me as I take quiet times to look within and open myself to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

**GOSPEL:** The gospel is literally 'the good news'. It lets us in on how things should be.  
*What attracts you to the 'good news' preached by the gospels?*

**SON OF GOD:** All believers who loved God and tried to live in accordance with God's will were called sons (children) of the Most High. People in Jesus' time would not have found it unusual to be called a child of God. Most of the Caesar's called themselves sons of the gods.

*How would this practice tend to confuse the issue for those living in Jesus' time? How is Mark using this designation? What made the change? Look up 2 Sam. 7:12-16.*

**ISAIAH:** Isaiah was the most often quoted prophet by Jesus, and there are references to Is. at least 41 times in the Christian scriptures. Jesus seemed to resonate to this prophet's word in a very special way.

*Look up Is. 61:1-4; 58:6-9; 40:1-9 to see if these passages give you an insight why Jesus was fond of Is.*

**MESSAGE / MESSENGER:** John was very clear about his role in salvation history. He was a voice with a message. Many people were ready to hear what this messenger was bringing.

*What messages are you ready to hear this Advent? Has anyone come your way with the right words?*

**PREPARE:** Advent is the time of preparation for the good news of God's Incarnation.

*How are you preparing your heart and mind to hear good news this season? Are other preparations getting in the way of this?*

**VOICE:** To be a voice is to give oneself to another.

*How is John giving himself to Jesus?*

**CALLING:** To have a 'calling' is to receive a mission from God to share in God's creative process.

*How does John's response share in God's creative process? Have you identified your mission? What is it?*

**DESERT:** The desert is often the place where the people of God discover the new thing God is doing.

*What did John discover there? Have you ever spent time in a 'desert' searching for God? What did you find?*



**STRAIGHT:** Something is straight when it has no bends, curves, or corners.

*How does John's message lead the people to Jesus without any bends, curves, or corners?*

**JOHN:** John was Jesus' cousin and shares the experience of the wilderness and his total dependence on God for his needs. He was seen as the one who would precede the Messiah.

*What in John's message helps you prepare for the coming of the Messiah this year?*

**BAPTIZING / BAPTISM:** This ritual signified a change of mind and heart that was to usher in a new way of being in the world. The person was to 'die' to their old ways and to 'rise' to a new way of living.

*If you were approaching John in the river, what would you need to 'die' to in order to 'rise' to a new way of living?*

**PREACHING:** Preaching is different than teaching. It has a prophetic element in it that makes it clear that you are bringing a message from someone other than yourself. The prophets often began by saying; "Thus says the Lord!"

*How do you distinguish teaching from preaching? Examine your different responses to preaching and teaching. How would you explain the difference?*

**REPENTANCE:** To repent is to turn around and look at something in a new way. John preached repent and then you can be saved. Jesus preached, you are saved, and people went home and repented.

*Which understanding appeals to you the most? Why?*

**FORGIVENESS:** To forgive is to give before you are asked.

*How does Jesus' preaching give before someone asks? Can you think of examples from the gospels?*

**SINS:** The word sin in the original language means, "to miss the mark". A sinner is one who tried something, but missed hitting the mark.

*In what ways do you miss the mark? What were you trying to do? Why did you fail? Are you still trying to hit the mark?*

**JUDEAN:** Judah was the Southern kingdom, and its highest moments were under King David. It contained Jerusalem, the holy city.

*What is Mark saying when he said that the whole countryside was coming out to hear John?*

**JERUSALEM:** A pious person felt Jerusalem to be the center of the earth. All the rituals, the festivals, and the learning were centered there. God, in the temple, was there.

*What is Mark saying when he includes Jerusalem as well?*

**CONFESSING:** In confession we acknowledge something and make it real by saying it to someone.

*What were the people around John confessing? What helped them become aware of missing the mark someplace? Do you suppose something in John's preaching made this possible? What do you think it was?*

**JORDAN:** The Jordan was one of those places in the bible that symbolized a transition point in the faith life of the people.  
*What 'Jordan's' are you coming to this Advent? Has any preaching helped you become aware of new areas of growth stirring in you this year?*

**CAMEL'S HAIR / LEATHER BELT:** Camel hair and a leather belt tell us that John identified with the prophetic role.  
*How do you identify a prophet today? What are the clues you use to sort out whom to listen to?*

**LOCUSTS / WILD HONEY:** The desert provided these basic foods for John. There is even a recipe for how to roast locusts in existence. God provided protein and sweetness for energy out in the desert.  
*Have you ever had a time where God provided the energy for going on and going deeper? What was that like? How were you able to share, like John, the fruits of that desert time with others?*

**SANDALS:** Untying sandals were the job of the lowest slave in Jesus' time.  
*What is John saying when he uses this metaphor about himself? What is he saying about Jesus?*

**WORTHY:** In the belief system of John and the people of his time, a person hoped to be worthy of God's love. Jesus comes along and says that the person's very being, means that God found it worth doing to create them in the first place.  
*Are you still working off the old theology of John, or have you dared to believe in Jesus' understanding? What are the ways you can tell what system you are working with?*

**WATER:** Water, in the rite of baptism, signifies the cleansing of the person of sin. It symbolizes a dying to an old way of being, and a rising to a new way of being in the world. John prepares the people for a radical change by saying Jesus would 'baptize' them with the Holy Spirit.  
*What do you think the people made of this change? How do you understand the change now?*

**HOLY SPIRIT:** In the Hebrew scriptures there was a concept of the holiness of God's spirit, but until Pentecost, the people would not have experienced it personally.  
*Does this help to explain why the people were so slow in catching on to Jesus' understanding of God? How do you conceive of the Holy Spirit today? What examples can you give of the Spirit's work in your faith life?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Mk. 1:2-8 // Mt. 3:1-11; Lk. 3:2-16; Mal. 3:1; Mk. 1:3 // Is. 40:1-5; Jn. 1:23; Mk. 1:8 // Jn. 1:27; Acts 1:5; 11:16;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Is. 40: 1-5,9-11; Ps. 85: 9-14; 2 Pt. 3: 8-14; Mk. 1: 1-8;  
Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 40:1-11; Ps. 85: 1-2, 8-13; 2 Pt. 3:8-15; Mk. 1: 1-8;

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

"Advent: the time to listen for footsteps — you can't hear footsteps when you're running yourself." -Bill McKibben

Advent for us means acceptance of this totally new beginning. It means a readiness to have eternity and time meet not only in Christ, but in us, in Man, in our life, in our world, in our time. The beginning, therefore, is the end. We must accept the end, before we can begin. Or rather, to be more faithful to the complexity of life, we must accept the end in the beginning both together.

The secret of the Advent mystery is then the awareness that I begin where I end because Christ begins where I end. In more familiar terms: I live to Christ when I die to myself. I begin to live to Christ when I come to the "end" or to the "limit" of what divides me from my fellow man: what I am willing to step beyond this end, cross the frontier, become a stranger, enter into a wilderness which is not "myself," where I do not breathe the air or hear the familiar, comforting racket of my own city, where I am alone and defenseless in the desert of God.

The victory of Christ is by no means the victory of my city over "their" city. The exaltation of Christ is not the defeat and death of others in order that "my side" may be vindicated, that I may be proved "right." I must pass over, make the transition (pascha) from my end to my beginning, from my old life which has ended and which is now death to my new life which never was before and which now exists in Christ.

Thomas Merton. "Advent: Hope or Delusion?" in *Seasons of Celebration*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965: 96-97

Before the middle of the fourth century, there were no liturgical seasons, such as Advent or Lent, or any idea of a "liturgical year," something many Christians take for granted today. The great Paschal Easter feast was the central focus of the Christian year, along

with the Sunday gatherings, considered "little Easters." Advent is first noted around the year 350, about the same time Christmas is first mentioned as being celebrated. The date of Christmas might well have been placed near the winter solstice as a replacement to the pagan solstice celebrations of the Roman Empire.

"There is such an enormous gap between our words and deeds! Everyone talks about freedom, democracy, justice, human rights, and peace; but at the same time, everyone, more or less, consciously or unconsciously, serves those values and ideals only to the extent necessary to defend and serve his own interests, and those of his group or his state. Who should break this vicious circle? Responsibility cannot be preached: it can only be borne, and the only possible place to begin is with oneself." - Vaclav Havel

### **The Gospel of the Ebionites** (in Epiphanius, *Against Heresies*, XXX.13.4, 6)

John was baptizing; and Pharisees went out to him and were baptized, and all Jerusalem. Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; his food was wild honey, tasting like manna, like a cake in olive oil. XXX.13.4

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, when Caiaphas was high priest, a certain man named John came baptizing with a baptism of repentance in the river Jordan. He was said to be of the family of Aaron the priest, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and all went out to him. XXX.1.6 Throckmorton, Burton, Jr. Ed. [Gospel Parallels, NY](#). Thomas Nelson Pub. 1949.

### **WARNING.....WARNING: ADVENT VIRUS**

Be on the alert for symptoms of inner Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. The hearts of a great many have already been exposed to this virus and it is possible that people everywhere could come down with it in epidemic proportions. This could pose a serious threat to what has, up to now, been a fairly stable condition of conflict in the world.

### **Some signs and symptoms of The Advent Virus:**

- A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences.
- An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
- A loss of interest in judging other people.
- A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
- A loss of interest in conflict.
- A loss of the ability to worry. (This is a very serious symptom.)
- Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
- Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
- Frequent attacks of smiling.
- An increasing tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.
- An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.

Please send this warning out to all your friends. This virus can and has affected many systems. Some systems have been completely cleaned out because of it. Anonymous via email

See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. Malachi 3:1.

Although we continue to celebrate Advent as a season, it is considerably more than that. Advent is a way of life, lived in watchfulness for the God who comes -- not just at Christmas, but every day, in myriad ways and in many wonderful and sometimes distressing disguises. Therefore we wait -- not passively, twiddling our thumbs, but actively. [Patricia Sanchez](#)

### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: [www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2005-6. Pgs. 6-10. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 200. Pgs. 5-8. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Mitchell, Stephen. [The Enlightened Heart](#). Harper & Row, NY. 1989. God is a pure no-thing. Page 89.

[William R. White. [Stories for the Journey](#). Augsburg Pub. House, Minneapolis, MN. 1988. Land of Fools. Pages 107-8.

Freeman, Sean. [Parables, Psalms, Prayers](#). Thomas More Press, Chicago. 1985. THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT Page 20-1.