

Lesson 2

Second Sunday in Advent

The Holy Gospel: Mark 1:1–8

Typically, Mark jumped right into his task, giving both the title and the purpose of his Gospel in seven Greek words, translated “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” His only prelude to telling about Jesus’ life and work is these few words about the Way-Preparer. It was important that his readers, largely Gentile Christians, understand that the Christ had His roots in Old Testament prophecy and that His Way-Preparer did too. Mark’s quotation from “Isaiah the prophet” is actually a combination of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Isaiah was an entity in itself while Malachi was combined with others as “The Book of the Twelve,” so Mark credited the major prophet. The quotation gives John’s person, his message, and the desert setting their basis in Old Testament prophecy.

John means “Yahweh is gracious”—a most appropriate name for the Way-Preparer of the One whose name, *Yeshua* (Jesus), means “Yahweh saves.” Luke says of John: “The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel” (1:80).

As an adult, John offered “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” The Greek *metanoia*, “repentance,” literally means “a change of mind and heart.” *Metanoia* implies far more than a guilty feeling upon getting caught; it includes a genuine change in the will to go in a completely new direction. *Aphesis*, “forgiveness,” implied “a sending away.” Only God can do it, but when He sends sins away, a person is fully free of them and of their consequences (see Psalm 103:12).

19. What outward act expressed the inner truth and qualified people for Baptism? How is that a part of our lives as Christians?

20. What was the point of John’s having them come out to meet him in the desert?

Mark’s description of John and of his ministry of preaching and baptizing leads to his stating John’s reason for being as the Way-Preparer. His mission was to point people to ___ who would come after him.

21. How did John emphasize the superiority of the One whose way he was preparing? How did he contrast their ministries?

22. When did the promised baptism with the Holy Spirit take place? (See Acts 1:5; 2:1–4; 11:1–18; Titus 3:4–7.)

23. What is the difference between John’s Baptism and the Baptism that Jesus later commanded? (See Matthew 28:18–20.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 40:1–11

Isaiah was God’s prophet during the reign of Hezekiah in Judah. It was a time of great peril for the nation. Assyrian armies had conquered the nations to the north, including the kingdom of Israel. They swept southward toward Jerusalem, overwhelming villages along the way. But Isaiah continually assured Hezekiah that God would prevent them from conquering Jerusalem. A siege was begun—and ended suddenly when, in response to Assyrian arrogance and blasphemy, “the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians” (2 Kings 19:35).

Chapters 1–39 of Isaiah deal with that history and Isaiah’s related prophecies. With chapter 40, the thrust changes to a future conquest of Judah by Babylon, and the eventual return from exile of a remnant to rebuild. The Lord prophesies through Isaiah about the future—also the ultimate, eschatological future of the messianic kingdom. In the Gospels, we hear Jesus quoting from “Isaiah the prophet.”

Chapter 40 begins the prophetic poems that announce the coming judgment of the nations and their gods and the vindication of Israel. They promise a return of exiles from Babylon, but they also have a cosmic, “end times” thrust. In this pericope, the new emphasis is fairly shouted: “Comfort, comfort My people, says your God.”

24. What is the significance of each of the three comforting proclamations to be spoken tenderly to Jerusalem?

25. What is the purpose of the highway construction project the voice calls for?

26. How would “the glory of the LORD . . . be revealed”? What dimension is added by “all flesh shall see it together”? How did Isaiah assert the authority and dependability of what he was proclaiming?

27. What did “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever” say to the exiles? With what truth does it make us reckon regarding our own lives?