



Mark 1:1-8

1 The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: 'Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way. 3 A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.' 4 And so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. 6 John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. 7 In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

Other readings: Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11 Psalm 84 (85) 2 Peter 3:8-14

Our gospel reading today is the first eight verses of the Gospel according to Mark. Mark will enter quickly into the adult life and ministry of Jesus. His opening verses deal with the preaching of John the Baptist and culminate in the encounter of Jesus and John at the Jordan. Today's reading includes information about the preaching of John and his words about the coming Messiah.

Mark begins with a profession of faith in Jesus as 'the Christ' ('the Messiah') and the 'Son of God'. These claims for Jesus will be seen to be true as Mark unfolds his story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Mark proclaims 'good news'. What the early preachers and teachers passed on by word of mouth, Mark now puts in writing for the generations to come. It is Mark as the first evangelist who devised this new way of writing, which became known as a 'gospel'.

The coming of Jesus is the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel recorded in the Scriptures. In particular, Mark makes a link between the prophets' words expecting a messenger to prepare for the coming of the Lord and the arrival of John the Baptist. The time of fulfilment has come, the time in which the promises of God will come to pass.

John's call is like that of the prophets. He urges a change of heart among the people. John accompanies his preaching with a ritual washing, a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. The climax of the reading is John's proclamation that one who is 'more powerful' is coming, one whose sandal-straps John is unworthy to undo. It is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.

Am I ready to hear the good news again?

What does the message of John the Baptist mean to me?

Let us pray for readiness to change our minds and hearts.

Let us pray that like John we will have the right priorities and make the right choices.