

An Announcement from the Wilderness

Mark 1:1-8

December 6, 2020

Mark starts off his gospel with this simple statement: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The living bible put it this way, “Here begins the wonderful story of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.” And then, right away, Mark introduces John the Baptist, the voice in the wilderness.

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It is interesting to see each of the four gospels in the New Testament tells about the coming of Christ in a different way.

Matthew begins this wonderful story by giving us a list of Jesus’ ancestors back through the reign of King David, all the way back to Adam. Then he tells us about Mary and Joseph and the announcement by an angel that Mary will conceive a child by the Holy Spirit. Then Matthew moves to Jesus’ birth and the story of the star in the heavens that leads the magi to the house where the young child lay.

Luke tells the story in a slightly different way. Luke begins with an angel announcing to Zechariah and Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s parents. Then Luke tells about the angel’s announcement to Mary that she will bear a child. Then he tells about a visit Mary makes to Elizabeth’s home. Then Luke tells about Christ’s birth with the angels praising God in the heavens and the shepherds hurrying to Bethlehem to worship the newborn babe lying on a manger.

The Gospel of John, written much later than the other Gospels, does not mention about the genealogies and the birth stories altogether. Instead John begins the wonderful story of Jesus Christ, going back to the beginning of the creation. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” Then John moves almost immediately to Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist.

And then here is the Gospel of Mark.

Most biblical scholars believe Mark was the first Gospel to be recorded and wrote his gospel in a hurry, giving us an account of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. So he did not have room in his gospel for shepherds in the field, angels singing on high, a bright star moving to Bethlehem, magi visiting the baby Jesus. No theological reflection of Jesus Christ, either. He begins his gospel right away with the story of John the Baptist. Verse 1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

John the Baptist was a strange looking spokesperson for God. He wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. John has an announcement to make to the world. It is an announcement we need to hear. It is an announcement of the good and wonderful news of Jesus the Messiah.

His announcement is this:

"After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (vs 7 & 8)

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What is he announcing?

First, he announces that this Messiah is someone very special, someone much more worthy than John himself.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John start off their gospels differently from one another. But there is one good news they shared with a same mind. That is, Jesus coming to the world is God Himself in human form. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is God in flesh coming to the world to meet and live in our midst. What a marvelous and wonderful and good news to all!

It's like a story about a little boy named Gabriel Hurler. In January 2009 Gabriel turned six years old. Gabriel was so focused on eating his birthday cake, that he

hardly noticed a giant package in the corner of the room. When another child pointed out the large gift, Gabriel ran over and began to tear off the wrapping.

When the package was open, Gabriel discovered it wasn't a bicycle or any of the other items a six-year-old would dream about for Christmas. Rather, it was Gabriel's dad, Army Specialist Casey Hurles, home on leave from the war in Iraq. Gabriel and his father had been apart for seven months, so when Casey learned his leave would coincide with his son's birthday, he hatched a plan to offer Gabriel an amazing surprise. He had himself wrapped up as the ultimate birthday gift for his child. In essence, that's what God did for us that first Christmas. He offered Himself as an amazing surprise. He wrapped Himself up in the form of a tiny baby.

When people ask, "Where is God? Who is God? What kind of God do you believe?" we point Jesus the Messiah who has come to the world as God in flesh. Paul says, "we look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created." (Colossian 1:15 the Message) Yes, in Christ we have God's own personal visit to the planet. Everything we know about God, we learn from Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. That is the good news for us. Hallelujah! Amen!

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But there is another announcement by John the Baptist. He announces another baptism, a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

"I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Baptism is a holy sacrament we Methodist honor and cherish and participate along with the Holy Communion. Baptisms is one of the most important things that can ever happen to us. Being baptized into the Christian faith, we have joined God's family. Through baptism, we are marked as one of God's children.

But it is more than that. Baptism is more than a ceremony. It is more than a symbol. It is a sign of new life in Christ Jesus. Baptism is a renewing of the mind. It is a transformation that changes our perspective and the direction of our life. It is allowing the spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit to come into our life and make us live a new life.

There is the baptism of water, but there is also a baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit happens when we consciously make room for Christ to come and take up residence in our lives.

Jesus cried out one day, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Jesus said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive. (John 7:37-38)

Can you imagine rivers of living water flowing out of your heart? That living waters are the work of the Holy Spirit and produces the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control.

We often say at this time of the year that we wish the Christmas spirit could stay with us all year long. Here is a secret of maintaining the Christmas Spirit. It is to pray that God will send His Holy Spirit to take up a permanent residence in our lives, and that is the greatest gift that we can receive from God.

So in this Advent season, we pray, singing again, “Into my heart, into my heart. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today and come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.” Yes, God has come into our world to live with us. God offers to us the gift of His Holy Spirit, His presence with us.

I want to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit into my life. I want Jesus to walk with me always. How about you? Would you join me?

In the name of our wonderful God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.