Advent 2 (B)| December 6, 2026

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

The Beginning of the Good News

THE WORD | <10 MINS

Read aloud the whole passage at least once.

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

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,'"

so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He 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. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

KEY TERMS |

- **Gospel**: literally means "good news"
- **Repentance**: literally means "turning around"

CONTEXT |

- Today we read the very first lines of the oldest Gospel in the Bible. The Gospel of Mark was written around 70 CE, earlier than any of the other three accounts of Jesus's life. In fact, Mark's Gospel served as a source for the later Gospels of Matthew and Luke.
- This passage, like the rest of the Gospel of Mark, jumps right into the action of the story. Mark's Gospel is short and fast-paced, moving quickly from event to event.
- The description of John the Baptizer echoes the Old Testament stories of Elijah the prophet, who also lived in the wilderness and ate surprising food.

BIG PICTURE | <15 MINS

Mark starts his Gospel directly and decisively: *The beginning of the good news; the Son of God.* There's no prologue, no fanfare, no throat-clearing introduction. Mark gets straight to the point. He invites us to jump right in—to a story that is at the same time just beginning, and also has been going on for generations.

The story begins, in Mark's telling, with Jesus's cousin John the Baptizer. Here, as well, Mark gets straight to the point. We don't hear a long speech from this cousin, full of theological nuggets of wisdom. Instead we learn what he looked like (scruffy and hairy), what he ate (what do locusts taste like anyway?), and how people responded to him: They came to the wilderness and kept on coming.

John calls the people to repentance, urging them to turn away from their sins. He baptizes them in the Jordan River, proclaiming God's forgiveness. And he also gives a preview of what's to come: There is a new baptism—and an even more powerful prophet—on the way. Stay tuned.

- Is this where you would expect the Gospel to start? What familiar stories does it skip over?
- Why do you think Mark chose to start his Gospel here?
- What sins do you think the people in the wilderness confessed? How did it feel for them to be forgiven?

DEEPER MEANING | <15 MINS

To quote the prayer book: "Again and again God calls us to return" (Eucharistic Prayer C, p. 370). Today's Gospel is paired with a reading from Isaiah, written in the long struggle of the Babylonian exile. A thread is perceptible between the two stories, as God urges the people to turn away from wickedness, in both the Old Testament and the New.

The God that John proclaims is the same God who spoke through the prophets. And the same God who led the Hebrew people home. Just as God promised comfort and tenderness to the Hebrew people in exile, God offers forgiveness to those who repent. This is a promise we can trust. This is good news.

In his teaching, John the Baptizer doesn't only call back to God's promises of old. He gives us a new promise as well: All the wonders God has done will pale in comparison to what's coming next. This promise is the perfect kickoff to the unfolding story of Jesus, who will bring a new dimension not only to baptism, but also to how we understand God's promises fulfilled

- When have you known the comfort and joy of being forgiven?
- Do you remember your own baptism? What about a baptism you recently witnessed? What do you remember about it? How did it feel?
- What about the story of Jesus most feels like "good news" to you?

INVITATION | <10 MINS

As we buckle up for the fast-paced, sometimes jarring ride that is Mark's gospel, we do well to remember that we're part of the story too. The same God who brought the people out of exile is the God who keeps faith with us today. We hear in John's preaching the precious reminder: God holds us to account, and God will always welcome us home. Even today, when we enter the waters of baptism, we join God's story of repentance and forgiveness, the reality of promises made and joyfully fulfilled.

In The Episcopal Church, when you want to be baptized, you don't have to go into the wilderness. No one will ask you to eat locusts and honey. But there are different questions you will be asked, as you prepare to turn in a new direction and walk the way of Jesus. Here's one of them: "Will you proclaim, by word and example, the good news of God in Christ?"

How each of us proclaims the good news will look different than how Mark wrote it or how John lived it. I wonder how your own life, your own story, will show forth the good news of Jesus Christ.

- Can you describe the good news of Jesus for you – not in my words, not in Mark's words, but in your own?
- How might your life, by example, proclaim the good news of Jesus?
- What is unfolding in this next chapter of your story of the good news?

CLOSING PRAYER | <5 MINS

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* – *Book of Common Prayer*

"… so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

– Mark 1:4

ABOUT THE AUTHOR |

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