

Reading: Mark 1:1-8 (NT Page 1002)

BACKGROUND TO THE READING

The second Advent is traditionally known as the Sunday where we as believers prepare ourselves to welcome Jesus as the Christ into our existence. Just like John the Baptist the church also announces the coming of the Messiah and urges all the believers to live lives in obedience to His call. On this Sunday the church reflects on the judgement of Christ. Therefore traditionally no Hallelujah's are sung but songs of repentance.

In our reading Mark is telling us about John the Baptist without giving us any other information about who he was, or where he was coming from. It is only the Gospel writer Luke who gives us more information like that he was the son of the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth, that he grew to manhood in the wilderness of Judaea, where he also received his prophetic call. Luke also records that his birth was foretold by an angel. Luke in agreement to Mark and Matthew emphasizes his role as the one who has to prepare all the people to welcome the Saviour into the world.

In all the Gospel accounts there are a strong reference to the association between John and Elijah who also lived in the desert, who also wore garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist. John only ate locusts and honey because it was "clean", as prescribed by the religious laws. The Old Testament emphasized that Elijah dressed this way because he (JUST LIKE John) did not depend on society for his sustenance.

Mark cites both Isaiah (40:3) and Malachi (3:1) here, although he mentions only Isaiah. Isaiah refers to preparing the way for God, who is coming to restore his people; Malachi refers to God coming in judgment to set matters straight among his people. Mark applies these texts about God to Jesus.

But Mark just like Matthew is as always also referring to the rich OT background which lies behind John's association with the

wilderness, in this case the wilderness of Judea. It was in the wilderness that God revealed himself to Moses, gave the law, and entered into the covenant with Israel. It was also the site of refuge for David and Elijah, and in this light became the anticipated site of God's future deliverance as we find in the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3.

THE MESSAGE of John the Baptist is clear: they must repent and be baptised. This would have been quite a shocking statement to Jews because it was only when pagans or gentiles wanted to embrace Judaism, that they were required to repent and then be baptised. Now John is telling the Jews that all of them must repent and be baptised. Mark is suggesting that a lot of Jews did come and were baptised. He also told them that someone will come after him, which will have much more power than he, and that He will baptise them with the Holy Spirit.

Some passages in the Old Testament speak of the Spirit being poured out like water. These passages refer especially to the time of God's kingdom, when he would cleanse his people and endow them with power to speak for him. Jewish tradition in Jesus' day still stressed that the Spirit would cleanse and provide prophetic anointing in the end time.

In Mark however, different from Mathew, there is no references to judgement. There is also no reference to the religious leaders and the need for them to follow their baptism with deeds of repentance.

The listeners of Mark could not have any more doubt about John's role. In his own words: he is not even also says about the one that will precede him "whose sandals he is not worthy to stoop down and untie." Usually in those days a slave carried their masters sandals. John is declaring that he is not worthy even to be Christ's slave.

Amen

SERMON

The text verse for the sermon is verse 2&3 ² It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"^b— ³ "a voice of one calling in the
desert,

'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"^c

In our reading this morning Mark confirms John's role as a prophet. He is the voice who cries out in the desert, and who has to prepare the way of Jesus Christ.

December is usually the month when most people struggle with bereavement, loneliness, depression and feelings of unworthiness. It is as if people are literally indeed crying out in the desert but unlike John – crying for help.

John was crying out for others to follow Jesus and his cry is still relevant to us today especially when we cry for help. John is confirming that Jesus is our ONLY hope and savior. God took us all on a journey from the desert of loneliness and hopelessness to an oasis of salvation and hope with the birth of Jesus Christ. Everyone that has faith, do not have to be feeling like people trapped in a desert. No the river of God's grace will transform each and every desert landscape into a oasis of splendid colours of green.

But we have to "see" the oasis in order to believe it. We have to make it our own in words and deeds through our faith, hope and love. Other people need to see our living hope, our deeds of love and acts of faith as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

We as followers of Jesus Christ who have been baptised in His Holy Name have a wonderful and great opportunity this time of year to openly proclaim the values of what Jesus taught us. The values of faith and forgiveness. The values of reconciliation and

peace. The values of love and hope. But if we do not follow up these values with actions or deeds, nothing will come of it.

People that receive gifts, usually show their appreciation through actions of praise. We need to do the same. We need to love more, forgive more, seek peace at all times, reconcile with other people, especially those that we "hate". We need to be a blessing to everyone around us.

If we want people to miss us one day, we need to start living lives in relation to God that makes a difference everywhere we go. If we want people to follow Jesus, then we must be like John the Baptist whose actions fitted his words.

You and I have the opportunity every Sunday to listen to God's word through His Holy Spirit. God is speaking. The question is: Are we listening to His voice or are we so absorbed in our own wisdom, in our knowledge and in our self appointed authority, that we miss what He is telling us?

John was just a messenger who told the people about Christ.

After Jesus was resurrected many other messengers till this day are proclaiming the same message.... The Jewish leaders, the majority of the Jews and the then local king did not listen to John's message. And the same is true today..... Are we listening?

May He reveal to us all this Christmas what he expects us all to do in the Year to come. May He help us all to listen to his voice calling out from the desert, I when I sit in my study preparing the sermon and you, sitting in the pews Sunday after Sunday...

Amen.

[b](#) Mal. 3:1

[c](#) Isaiah 40:3