

Focus on Mark 1:1–8

Isa. 40:1–11
Ps. 85:1–2, 8–13
2 Pet. 3:8–15a
Mark 1:1–8

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” Judy Yates Siker

What the audience is about to hear/read is good news! It is the good news of God through Jesus, Jesus who is God’s anointed, the Christ. This first-century audience of Jesus followers could use good news as they struggled to survive in the years during or just after the Jewish War with Rome (about 66–70 CE).

Clearly, this is not the birth story of Matthew or Luke. No manger scenes derive from this Gospel. Yet, here in the opening lines of Mark we have a “birth story” of sorts. It is good to tell of new beginnings, to tell about a God who breaks into our time with good news.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” Christopher R. Hutson

Mark teaches us to see God by looking to Jesus. But to understand Jesus correctly, Mark looks way back to the prophets of Israel. He sees them looking forward in anticipation of God’s intervention. When he stands with them and looks as they look, he sees John the Baptist in line with them and looking in the same direction.

We are like the crowds listening to the prophet John, seeking direction for our future. John points us to Jesus, who came so long ago and who for us is yet coming. As in the past, Jesus may shock us when he comes and shows us who we really are before God.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,” Lillian Daniel

The second Sunday of Advent is a time to remember the humility that comes with honoring our antecedents. We all have ancestors in our callings, people who prepared the way.

Waiting for the savior is humbling. “I have baptized you with water,” John says, “but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Thank God, is our advent prayer. Thank God we get to prepare, but Christ gets to do the rest. Thank God we can wait, and trust that he will get here in the end.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,”

Martin B. Copenhaver

The text is replete with the Advent themes of anticipation and preparation. John draws people from the countryside and from the city, and from whatever occupies them, to consider for a time what it might mean to prepare for the one who is to come.

John the baptizer proclaims that preparation involves repentance and confession . . . facing the truth about ourselves and changing the direction of our lives. This bracing look back that John insists upon is so very different from the kind of nostalgia that always threatens to take center stage during the Advent season in the culture—and sometimes in our churches as well.

Old Testament Echoes in Mark 1:1–8

Read 2 Kings 1:8.

✠ What similarities do you find between Elijah's attire and John's?

Read Malachi 3:1 and 4:5–6.

✠ How does John's message compare with that of the messenger described in Malachi?

Read Isaiah 40:1–11.

✠ How is Isaiah's message similar to or different from that of the messenger in Malachi?

Read the following excerpt:



Mark says the beginning of the gospel is “just as” Isaiah said. It is not that Isaiah was predicting John the Baptist, but Mark sees an analogy between Isaiah 40:3 and the preaching of John “in the wilderness.” Isaiah provides the frame of reference for understanding the Baptist. In its own context, Isaiah 40:3 looks for God's intervention to restore Israel from Babylonian exile. For Mark, John is like the voice that announces “comfort” (Isaiah 40:1) to the exiles in Babylon. Although first-century Jews were not in exile, they were under foreign occupation. It was as if the Babylonian exile had followed them home, and Isaiah 40 offered a fitting analogy for those who looked for restoration.

But lest his readers get the wrong idea of a triumphalist stance toward Rome, Mark prefaces his quotation of Isaiah 40:3 with one from Malachi 3:1. . . . In Malachi 3–4, God's messenger clears the way (3:2) by calling God's people to repentance. Mark sees an analogy between “Elijah” (Mal. 4:5) and John. Just as Malachi warned of God's judgment against the sins of Israel, so John preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark's juxtaposition with Malachi 3:1 causes us to notice that there is also a reprimand in the comforting oracle of Isaiah (40:27). We who look to God to deliver us from our enemies must first examine ourselves to see whether we are fit to stand before a righteous God.

—Excerpted from Christopher R. Hutson, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 46–48.

✠ What do the Old Testament passages and the excerpt above contribute to your understanding of Mark 1:1–8?