
Mark 1:1-11 - Jesus is Baptised

Second reading Isaiah 42:1-4

When C.H. Spurgeon opened his new church building, he vowed to focus on Jesus alone. Likewise in our ministry Jesus must be central. So we turn to Mark. This Gospel is probably based on the memories and the preaching of the apostle Peter.

Mark takes no time to tell a Christmas story and he gives no details about Jesus' baptism: this is a Gospel of action! Mark begins with 'the final score', the correct perspective on Jesus. Later in the Gospel we will see how the disciples and others struggle to understand who Jesus is.

In Mark 1:1, the original NIV (1978) had 'The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. But in the NIV revised in 2011 it says: 'The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.' We see that the word 'gospel' means 'good news' and that the title Christ is a translation of the title Messiah. (So Christ is not Jesus' surname.)

Mark's readers were probably in Rome; the Roman Empire claimed to have 'good news' for the people. But that was of course not true, for Rome was cruel. Rome's news was fake news! The real good news is that God comes to earth in Jesus and fulfils the Scriptures! Mark shows how Isaiah is fulfilled, but he does not always tell us explicitly:

- In John the Baptist: verse 3 shows the fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3.
- In heaven being torn open: verse 10 shows the fulfilment of Isaiah 64:1: 'Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!'
- In Jesus receiving the Spirit: verse 10 also shows the fulfilment of both Isaiah 11:2 and 42:1:

11:2 'The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD'

42:1 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.'

At the end of our passage (vs 11), the voice of God confirms vs 1: Jesus is the Son of God. God adds that Jesus is the beloved one; so he is like Isaac (Genesis 22:2). This is another allusion to the Scriptures.

But Jesus is God, so why does he need to be baptised? Because he is also truly human! Only so he could save us. The great mystery! God/Jesus took the problem of sin entirely seriously and came to die on the cross. He did what we could not do.

As a result, God now also says to us: 'You are my beloved child.' Have you heard that? Have you accepted it? Have you responded and been baptised?

[This sermon deliberately skips John the Baptist, verses 2-6. And because Revd Rob Stevens discussed 'good news' and 'kingdom' with you some weeks ago, these things get no attention here either. Another time we may speak about Jesus baptising us with the Spirit.]
