**Jesus heralded by John the Baptist**  5/2/23 dkm

Read: Isaiah 42:1-9, Mark 1

Text: Mark 1:2-12

Psalms: 34:1-7, 2, 18:13-20, 118:15-24, 118:27-29

It was some weeks after Christmas when I noticed a huge nativity scene still in place outside a church. Are not such things supposed to be taken down by New Year? It is good to celebrate the birth of Jesus our Lord but he did not remain a baby. And no matter how many halos are placed over the manger, he was just like any other baby growing up in a loving home, although Luke tells us that at the age of twelve Jesus showed remarkable knowledge and understanding (Luke 2:47).

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ for Mark was the heralding of the coming of the Lord by John the Baptist. Mark does not begin with the birth of Jesus like Matthew and Luke; not that he denies or downplays the incarnation (cf. 6:3). If Mark had included anything of Jesus the baby, it would probably have been the Magi coming from the East looking for the King of the Jews (Mat 2:1,2). John proclaims one coming after him who is mightier than him, and Jesus announces ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’ (1:7, 15). Showing that Jesus is king, a greater king than Caesar, seems to be Mark’s desire as he writes to encourage suffering Christians in Rome.

Mark begins this gospel with John the Baptist heralding the arrival of Messiah or anointed one or king. He has crowds going out to John at the Jordan, and by the end of chapter 1 everyone is looking for Jesus. While shepherds and three Magi came to worship baby Jesus, the only crowd to come was of angels from heaven. But as soon as Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty, crowds started to follow him. He became famous as a miracle worker, a miracle worker with a message for the world.

Mark entitles his book, ‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ (1:1), but this title is linked to the prologue that follows by the word ‘as’, ‘as it is written’. A couple of passages from the prophets are the starting point for Mark’s gospel of Jesus Christ. He moves on to the man announced by the prophets, namely John the Baptist, then to an affirmation of Jesus from heaven, and finally to an acknowledgment by Satan. Jesus is not just a king; he is the heavenly king, the King of the kingdom of God.

**1. As it is written**

Gentiles may not have been familiar with the Scriptures of the Jews, although those who were God-fearers may have been. But Gentiles, especially Romans, would have known of the Jewish hope for Messiah. The Jews in Jerusalem hated their city being occupied by Romans. When they heard John the Baptist preaching, and then Jesus doing mighty works, they got excited. They welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our father David’ (11:10).

The prophet Malachi spoke of the Lord sending a messenger who ‘will prepare the way before me’ (Mal 3:1). Although Malachi wrote after the return of the exiles, Mark links this prophecy with that of Isaiah prophesying the return of the exiles, at least in the first instance. In fact, we could go back to Moses and the exodus generation coming through the wilderness. The exiles coming from Babylon came through the wilderness. Mark, like Matthew and Luke, sees this prophecy being fulfilled in John the Baptist coming into the wilderness of the Jordan. John was slightly older than Jesus, a ‘miracle baby’ himself and dedicated to the Lord as a Nazirite- no strong drink (Luke 1:15) and no hair cutting. John is the last of the OT prophets, the one to literally point to the Messiah.

John appeared in the wilderness dressed just like the prophet Elijah: a camel-hair coat with a leather belt (1:6, 2Kings 1:8). He had a simple desert diet of locusts and wild honey. Some experts tell us that we should be eating insects, and may have to when meat is banned. I have not yet heard these experts referring to the diet of John the Baptist as a model to follow!

**2. Announced by man**

We will soon get to see the coronation of King Charles III. He will not have John the Baptist announcing his arrival in the desert, but he will have trumpeters going before him, and a herald introducing him as the King of England and the realms of the Commonwealth. His coronation will not be done in a corner! When Jesus began his ministry, John the Baptist announced his arrival saying, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ (John 1:29).

John not only announced the arrival of Jesus, the Son of God and saviour of the elect, he prepared the way for Jesus by drawing people’s attention to their sin. John came baptising and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4). Judea and Jerusalem were corrupt and violent places under Roman rule and the rule of Herod. Moreover, the priesthood was corrupt, as Jesus soon discovered. From top to bottom, from the Pharisees and the police to the tax collectors, men were after money and power for themselves. John called them a ‘Brood of vipers’ (Mat 3:7). Mark does not go into detail, except to say that crowds went out to hear John, and, confessing their sins, were baptised by him in the Jordan (1:5).

John the Baptist made it clear that he was not Messiah but that Messiah was coming after him. He was preparing the way according to the prophetic word. This ‘coming one’ was mightier than John, so mighty that John the prophet was not worthy to stoop down and untie his sandals (1:7). It was the servants task to take off the sandals of visitors and wash their feet, but so mighty was this One that John felt unworthy even to perform this humble duty (cf. Luke 3:16).

John also made it clear that while he baptised with water, this coming One would baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:8). When David was anointed king of Israel by Samuel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (1Sam 16:14). This coming One would be empowered to baptise with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. Mark has told us that Jesus is the Son of God so this makes sense, although we have not yet been told who this coming One is.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is not seen until Jesus is risen from the dead and gone into heaven. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, the sign being flames of fire sitting on each one (Acts 2:3). The apostles went on to baptise believers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, with the gift of the Spirit accompanying their belief and baptism. The Holy Spirit is a guarantee from God that we belong to him (2Cor 1:22). The Spirit quickens our dead hearts and reminds us of what Jesus taught- through His word, of course (John 16:13). When Jesus came into the world, God became present with his people in his Son. He is now present by his Spirit in the hearts of believers. Have you been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? If so, are you letting the Spirit guide you or are you quenching the Spirit?

**3. Affirmed by a voice from heaven**

The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, introduces Jesus as coming from Nazareth in Galilee (1:9). We need to read Matthew’s gospel to find out that Mary, his mother, and Joseph came from a village in Galilee called Nazareth- although we could assume this from Mark’s reference to Jesus coming from Nazareth. Crowds were going out to hear this strange man called John, and to be baptised by him, so Jesus went along also. As the Son of God, Jesus did not need to be baptised because he had no sin, so John, realising his unworthiness to baptise Jesus, protested. But Jesus insisted ‘in order to fulfil all righteousness’, meaning it was God’s plan for him to identify with sinners in this way (Mat 3:14, 15).

Mark focusses on the baptism of Jesus itself, noting the immediacy (1:10). Mark keeps things moving along in his writing, with numerous references to ‘immediately’ (1:10, 12, and 18). As Jesus came up from the water, ‘He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove’ (1:10). Jesus saw this and so did John, and probably all the people gathered there. Why a dove? At Pentecost the Spirit came down in flames of fire - the same coming down. Does a dove picture purity and gentleness? Or is there some link back to the Spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2, making this a sign of the new creation? In any case, it was a visible representation of the otherwise invisible Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit is witnessing to the worthiness of the Son to be our Saviour.

With the heavens open for the Spirit to come down, there is a voice from heaven, the voice of the Father (1:11). The words are heard and recorded by Mark, as well as Mathew and Luke. Here is verbal witness of the Father regarding his Son, Jesus Christ: ‘You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (1:11). These words are an affirmation to the whole world that this person, just baptised by John, is the Son of God, as declared by Mark in verse 1. He is the beloved and only begotten Son of God the Father (cf. Ps 2:7). The Father already delights in His Son (Isa 42:1). Even to leave the glory heaven and be born into this sinful world was a great ‘come down’ or humiliation by Jesus. The Father knows that his beloved Son will complete the task he sent him to do, despite temptation by Satan and suffering at the hands of men. These words were in the first instance directed at Jesus and must have been an ongoing comfort to him as he faced these challenges on the way to the cross.

**4. Acknowledged by Satan**

The coming of God’s Son into this world posed the greatest threat to Satan’s rule since the day he was victorious in the Garden of Eden. God allowed Satan to tempt his specially created man and woman. He succeeded, succeeded in plunging the whole world into the darkness of sin and death. Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Would God’s Son do the same now that he had taken on flesh and become a man?

Satan was watching John baptise Jesus and was ready to pounce when given the go ahead. We think of Job whom the Lord described as blameless and upright. Satan hates such people; he was desperate to bring Job down. So he accused God of protecting Job and blessing him; in other words, of not letting him be tested. Love cannot be forced. Love must be tested to see if it is genuine. And so God’s only beloved had to be tested when he came into this world.

‘Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness’ (1:12). The Spirit who had just settled upon Jesus, confirming his divinity, now sent him into the desert to reveal his humanity. Jesus submitted to baptism but must further identify with humanity by being tested or tempted at the hands of Satan. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness without food and without human companionship or help, much the same as Moses on Mt Sinai (Exod 34:28). At the end of this period he was hungry, according to Matthew who gives a much more detailed account of Satan tempting Jesus; although only Mark mentions wild beasts (1:13); some think this is significant in light of Christians being fed to the lions in Rome, or maybe it relates to Daniel’s experience or testing.

After David was anointed, he spent years on the run from Saul, being tempted at times to kill him. But David knew that vengeance belongs to the Lord and resisted this temptation. Jesus could have done whatever Satan tempted him to do but he resisted saying, ‘It is written’. He was determined to listen to the voice of God, not the voice of Satan, a very important determination for you and me if we are followers of Jesus.

The spiritual realms were throwing everything at Jesus as he began his earthly ministry, the ministry by which we are saved. But despite the hunger and the dangers of the desert or wilderness, and the enticing promises of Satan, Jesus stood firm. God his Father sent angels from heaven to minister to him at the end of the forty days. You are in this world and you will be tempted by Satan, but remember, you can resist him because Jesus has won the victory over Satan.