



The Story Of Salvation
NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010
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20. Jesus Arrives and Commences His Ministry

I have chosen the Gospel of Mark for this study for the following reasons:

- a. The first sentence in the Gospel clearly states what it is all about.
- b. Mark links the past with the present.
- c. He introduces us to the man Jesus.
- d. The appearance of John the Baptist who proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me.” (See previous study)
- e. The baptism of Jesus.
- f. The temptation of Jesus
- g. The beginning of Jesus ministry.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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, ’”(Mk 1:1–3 NRSV)

Although introduced as a prophecy from Isaiah, it is in fact a blending of three texts that originally had nothing to do with each other: Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3.

The texts refer to the coming of Yahweh Himself in salvation and judgement. What is so astonishing is that the messenger is no longer paving the way for Yahweh but for another powerful one, Jesus of Nazareth, who is now to be acknowledged as the Lord. This means that God’s coming in salvation and judgment, promised in Scripture takes place in Jesus.¹ Mark, by quoting from Exodus, Isaiah and Malachi, verifies that the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures represented by the Torah, the Major and Minor Prophets confirm what he is about to tell. He is linking the past with the present. He is telling the story of the way of God (See Mk12:14) in history with the story of the way of the Lord for John the Baptist², for Jesus of Nazareth, and for his disciples and indirectly for us.

The Baptism of Jesus of Nazareth (Mk 1:9–11).

This baptism is later interpreted by Peter as the anointing of Jesus (Acts 10:38) and Jesus likewise interprets it as such (Luke 4:17–21). Acts 10:38 points out that it was as a

¹ Guelich, Robert A., *Mark 1 - 8:26*, W.B.C., (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), pp. 10–12.

² In NRSV John is called the Baptist in Mark 6:25 and 8:28. He is called John the baptiser in Mark 1:4; 6:14, & 24.

result of the anointing ('with the Holy Spirit and power') that Jesus went about doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed of the devil.

The baptism reveals Jesus as God's beloved Son the Bearer and Dispenser of the Holy Spirit. It is passages like this one that have contributed to the understanding of God as One Being: Father, Son and Spirit.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee.

Jesus' arrival on the scene is a bit of an anticlimax. It is not, as Malachi and Isaiah had led us to expect, God himself who appears in irresistible splendour among his people, but it is Jesus from Nazareth, and he comes as one among the penitent and expectant crowd to John's baptism. From what has been written before we would have expected to be introduced by a very powerful figure but Jesus appeared looking like an ordinary man coming from an obscure little village in Galilee.

It is striking that at Jesus' baptism, at his trial and his resurrection Mark wants us to really understand that the story from beginning to end is about Jesus, the man from Nazareth (Mk 1:9, 14:67, 16:6). It is equally striking that an unclean spirit not only identifies Jesus as a man coming from Nazareth, but also the Holy One of God! (Mk 1:24). It is this man Jesus who is declared by God to be his beloved Son at his baptism. It is this man Jesus who has overcome Satan in the wilderness and therefore able to cast out filthy spirits in the Capernaum synagogue (Mk 1:25–26) and other places (Mk 5:12–13). It is this man Jesus who is Israel's Messiah. Twice blind Bartimaeus calls Jesus of Nazareth "Son of David" which is a messianic title (Mk 10:47). Mark makes sure that we understand that it is this man Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified and raised from the dead.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to be baptised by John, the inferior? Why would Jesus submit to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? Is it the same baptism as in 1:5?

...Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.

Mark does not give us a theological explanation why Jesus submits to this baptism by John. Matthew does. If John's baptism was intended to be the preparation for the New Age, then this rite of baptism which gathered together a holy people of God who affirmed in their act of committal that they were ready for his coming, then it was natural for Jesus to associate himself with this movement, and to join those who by baptism showed that they looked for the coming Kingdom of God.³

the heavens torn apart

Only Jesus saw this and only he saw the Spirit descending and heard the voice from heaven. Matthew and Luke use the Greek verb 'to open'. Mark uses the Greek verb *schizo* meaning 'to tear' or 'to rip'. What is opened may be closed again, but the dynamic and violent action of the heavens being ripped apart suggests irreparable and permanent damage. When Jesus comes out of the water, Mark tells us, all heaven breaks loose.

We immediately think of the tearing apart of the temple curtain at the moment of Jesus' death in Mark 15:38. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews used this image to speak

³ Hooker, Morna D., *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Black's N.T.C., (Hendrickson, 1991), p. 44.

of the significance of Jesus' death, that we now have access to a gracious God (Heb 10:19 NIV).

The tearing of the heavens may indicate that we have access to God, but "more accurate than referring to our access to God would be to speak of God's access to us. God comes whether we choose or not. The barriers are torn down and torn open and God is now in our midst and on the loose in our own realm".

The hope of Isaiah, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—(Isa 64:1) has come to pass and was an appeal to God to come down and save his people.⁴

There are three important references to the Spirit in Mark's prologue, Mark 1:8, 10 & 12.

"I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

"... he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him".

"And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness".

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is another eschatological theme. In the Hebrew Scriptures God himself will pour out his Spirit on both men and women.

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring (Isa 44:3).

and

I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD (Ezek 39:29).

and

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit (Joel 2:28–29).

If John's call to water baptism marks the eleventh hour, to be baptised with the Holy Spirit is a sign of the arrival of the eschatological era.

The prophecy that Jesus will baptise men and women in the Holy Spirit is not fulfilled in the course of Mark's gospel. Mark is of course writing to people who confess Jesus as Lord and would have experienced the coming of the Spirit in their own lives.

...the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

After the tearing of the heavens, the Spirit comes down and enters Jesus. The importance of the event lies in the Spirit's coming. In the Hebrew Scriptures the promises of the coming of the Spirit are linked with the coming of the age of salvation.

The Messiah was said to possess the Spirit.

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—(Isa 11:2 NIV).

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; (Isa 61:1)

⁴ Garland, David E., *Mark*, NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 48. See also Juel, Donald H., *A Master of Surprise. Mark Interpreted*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 34–36 & Juel, *Mark*, pp. 33–34.

In the Old Testament the Spirit is described as resting on a variety of men - especially leaders, prophets and kings - giving them the power needed for their difficult tasks. It was an obvious step to assume that the Spirit would also be given to any future 'Messiah' for his ministry. The Spirit comes, therefore, as God's enabling presence to equip Jesus for his ministry. All Jesus does is in the power of the Holy Spirit (See especially Matthew 12:28).

And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved"⁵

The voice from heaven is God the Father personally speaking; it is a direct word of God Himself. Jesus is identified by the voice from heaven as "my Son, the Beloved". The words spoken are a conflation of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1,

I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have begotten you (Ps 2:7).

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. (Isa 42:1)

Psalm 2 is an enthronement psalm, which celebrates the enthronement of the king to rule over God's people. It is also a Messianic Psalm, meaning that it is predicting the coming of the Messiah. This is God's announcement that Jesus has been chosen to rule over his people and that he assumes royal power as king. This king is also God's chosen Servant on whom the Spirit rests, who will give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). At the crucifixion Mark emphasis six times that Jesus dies as the King of the Jews or King of Israel.⁶

The term 'the beloved' often refers to an only child. As in Abraham's only son Isaac.

He said,

"Take your son,

your only son

Isaac,

whom you love" (Gen 22:2)⁷

We also encounter this phrase in the parable of the wicked tenants in Mark 12. There the owner of the vineyard finally sends his only son, whom he loved (Mk 12: 6 NIV).

The phrase 'my Son, the Beloved' heard by Jesus at his baptism and by six persons on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mk 9:7), could well be translated as 'my only Son'. The voice from heaven identifies Jesus as the one who has a special and unique relationship with the Father - his 'only son.

"..., with you I am well pleased."

These words are taken from Isa 42:1

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

God delights in Jesus because of Jesus' obedient response to the divine will. It is a phrase used in the Hebrew Scriptures of God's delight in his people Israel when they are obedient (e.g. Ps 149:4a).

This declaratory event at Jesus' baptism serves as the attestation and installation or coronation by God, the Father. It declares that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son, the victorious

⁵ Or my beloved Son.

⁶ Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26 & 32.

⁷ Literal translation of the Hebrew.

King of Psalm 2; the Servant on whom God has poured out his Spirit. The Son who has been chosen for the task upon which he is about to enter, the one who is destined to die.

Geoffrey Bingham warns: “Any sense of his being adopted as Son at this point must be rejected”⁸

The Temptation of Jesus in the Desert (Mark 1:12–13; Matthew 4:1–8).

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

Here in the wilderness, it is the same onslaught upon the Last Adam as on the first Adam. The first Adam hears the word of evil and accedes; the Last Adam denies the tempter by the simple use of the word of God as Matthew makes clear. Three times Jesus answered Satan, “It is written” that is “God has spoken” (Mt 4:4, 7, 10). The testing is “If you are the Son of God...” (Mt 4:3). This is not defended, since in the baptism the Father has affirmed this. Hence Satan cannot entice Jesus to receive a kingdom by means other than that innately of the Kingdom of God, i.e. doing the will of the Father. It also seals the fact that the Kingdom is won by the way of the Cross (cf. Matt. 16:21–23).

The story of the temptation in the desert shows us Jesus confronting Satan in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who takes the initiative and drives Jesus into the wilderness. The verb translated ‘drove out’ is a forceful one and is used repeatedly by Mark of the expulsion of demons. Jesus is being tempted by none less than Satan and that affirms his stature as the Son of God. As the story of the Gospels unfolds we know that this encounter was decisive. Jesus holds out against God’s adversary when put to the test. Here we have a glimpse of the real struggle in the Gospels. Those who play a part in the rest of the story are not the main characters; hidden behind them is another and more important struggle, the one between God and Satan. Behind the human drama lies a cosmic conflict; the kingdom of Satan is under threat by the coming of the king of the Kingdom of God.

The meaning of Jesus living with the wild animals is uncertain. There are several explanations. Probably best to be seen as belonging to the normal environment of the wilderness.

The forty days in the desert call forth memories of Israel’s sojourn there and God’s rich provisions for His people (Deut 2:7). The prophet Jeremiah especially looked back to the years spent in the wilderness as Israel’s honeymoon period (Jer 2:2). Because of Israel’s original sojourn, the wilderness came to be associated with the idea of a new Exodus (See Isaiah 40). The eschatological hope came to be centred on the wilderness. It also recalls Moses’ stay on Mount Horeb. The care provided by the heavenly messengers also reminds us of a similar circumstance when Elijah was cared for by an angel before embarking on his 40 days’ trek into the wilderness to Mount Horeb. All these help us to link Jesus with the memorable events of Israel’s past.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Jesus returns triumphantly from the encounter in the desert and joyously announces this good news from God about the coming of the Kingdom of God. God’s appointed time

⁸ Bingham, Geoffrey C., *The Gospel According to Mark*, (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1997), p. 20.

had come. Many centuries before there had been another time when the nation of Israel was about to cross the Jordan to take possession of their promised land. In the covenant made with Israel, the opening words of the book of Deuteronomy were those of Moses, representing the true King of Israel. But now in the New Covenant, the Kingship of God is inaugurated by the incarnate King himself, who could speak his own words. He not only proclaimed the Good News of God but was the Good News himself, through whom this good news was effected in history.