

## Mark 1:1-8: Christmas According To Mark

Christmas is almost upon us! Two weeks to go! Unless we've been hidden away far from any news of the birth of Jesus, the only Saviour, we know the Christmas story, mainly from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

The other Gospel writers, Mark and John, begin their biographies of Jesus in a different way:

Mark writes: *The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

John writes: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. The word Word refers to the Lord Jesus.*

There's no doubt who is central in their Gospels. In Mark, Jesus is *the Son of God* (or God the Son) and in John he is God come in human form.

While Jesus is central in Mark's writings, there are four people to consider in our Gospel reading for to-day:

### **MARK:**

Mark was not one of 'The Twelve' Disciples nor is he referred to as an Apostle. However as we read the Book of Acts we learn that he was an important young leader in the early Church, partly responsible for the spread of Christianity.

It is widely believed that Mark depended upon the Apostle Peter for much of the 'eye-witness' material which Mark included in his account of some of Jesus' ministry.

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Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four and was written for a Gentile (non-Jewish) readership.

### **ISAIAH:**

The Old Testament Prophet Isaiah exercised his ministry in about 800BC. He is the Prophet most often quoted by the New Testament writers.

Mark includes this quote in verses 2-3 from Isaiah Chapter 40 to show that John the Baptist and Jesus were foretold long before they arrived on the scene in Israel.

The last book of the Bible, Malachi, written 400 years before John and Jesus, also spoke of the coming of a special messenger and his Lord: "*See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come*", says the Lord almighty. (Malachi 3:1)

### **JOHN THE BAPTISER:**

Mark introduces John in such a way that it is clear that he believes that John is *the messenger* referred to in Isaiah 40. This was exciting! This was an indication that God was about to send His Messiah, His Christ, His Saviour in the person of His only Son.

We read in verses 4-6 about Mark baptising and preaching. His message was demanding and required a response. He called on the Jewish people to repent of their sin, to turn back to God so that their sins could be forgiven.

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And people responded! *The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him!* They confessed their sins and were baptised in the Jordan River. This was no quiet activity done in secret but a movement embraced by large crowds of people.

Mark describes John's interesting outfit and eating habits in verse 6. He fitted in with the Old Testament prophets of a long gone era.

John made it clear what he was doing as Mark records: *this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. (Verses 7-8)*

John was preparing the way for someone else of far greater importance than he. He said elsewhere, speaking about Jesus: *He must increase but I must decrease.*

### **JESUS:**

And so now we come to the central figure of Christianity, the one to whom John was pointing. In this brief passage we see 5 things about Jesus:

- The 'gospel' or good news which Mark wrote was all about Jesus.
- He is identified as *Jesus Christ*. *Jesus* (or Joshua) was his name and *Christ* was his office or title. He was the Christ, the promised Messiah who would save the people from their sins.
- His coming fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Isaiah. He was *the Lord* of whom Isaiah spoke.
- John spoke of the power which Jesus possessed and his status being far above that of John.

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- While John baptised with water, Jesus was the one who would *baptise with the Holy Spirit*. This was John's way of saying that when people repented of their sin and turned back to God, Jesus would give them the Holy Spirit.

He later told His followers that the Holy Spirit *would be with them and in them* in a permanent way after he had died and gone back to Heaven from whence he had come.

As we prepare to celebrate the first Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, let's also remember the purpose for which he came:

He came to bring people back to God, through repentance and faith in His death on the cross, as the payment for our sin.

The people of John's day responded to his call. How have we responded to Jesus' call to follow him?