

Hark the Herald

In our gospel reading today, we read of the ministry of John the Baptist. The fulfillment of the Prophet Isaiah, indicating the arrival of a messenger. A messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord and make straight paths for him. The message of the herald, John the Baptist, is simple. There is one who is to come, one who is more powerful, one who is more worthy, a baptizer, not of water, but of the Holy Spirit.

Mark begins by declaring this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The term "Gospel" is very familiar to us; we call the first four books of the New Testament 'the gospels', and we recognise them as the accounts of Jesus' ministry on earth. However, in the New Testament, the word "Gospel" is never in reference to one of these books. The word 'gospel' that Mark uses here is in reference to the message of salvation. As it was translated, the word 'gospel' actually shares meaning with another phrase which we have seen in our Old Testament reading. The word 'gospel' and the phrase 'good news' derive from the same greek word "euongelion". The messenger has been sent beforehand, to share the good news, to share the gospel. "Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" John the Baptist, the herald of good news, is the one sent by God to be the messenger for

the salvation found in Christ.

It isn't random that Mark would mention that John the Baptist came out dressed in camel's hair and a leather belt. This is the image of the great prophet Elijah, who was prophesied in the book of Malachi to be the messenger to come and declare the coming of the Messiah. In this prophecy, God himself declared that the messenger would come "before me", that is we know the one that would come after the messenger would be God himself."It is the Lord who will come...the messenger of the covenant". John the Baptist, the messenger sent in the power and the spirit of Elijah spoke of the one who was to come after him, one greater in power than he, so great that not even John the Baptist would stoop down and untie his sandal.

So what were the preparations that John the Baptist made for Jesus? By proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The people of Jerusalem had to prepare their hearts for the arrival of Jesus. As they were not ready to meet Jesus, John came to preach to them of what is required of them for their salvation. Baptism of repentance for their sins. The people needed to have their sins forgiven. In order for them to have their sins forgiven they needed to repent of their sins, and to demonstrate that repentance they would be willing to be baptized. This baptism didn't bring them forgiveness for their sin, it only declared their intention. The Jews had ceremonial washings, but not baptisms, and so when a Jew partakes of this one-time symbolic baptism they declare

themselves before God no less needing forgiveness for their sins than a gentile. This was the message preached by John as he declared the coming of Christ.

God shows us, through the fulfillment of the prophecies, his faithfulness towards his people. Through fulfilling the prophecies, the emergence of a herald comes to prepare the way for the king, and to prove his faithfulness. It is in this faithfulness that we trust. When God says through the prophets that a messenger will come to declare the coming king and make his path straight, we can trust that he will send that messenger to come before Him because it is written right there in our gospel reading. It is the same God that promised us that Jesus would return again to take us with Him to be seated at the father's right hand. It is that promise that we read about in our new testament reading today, a promise that we can put our trust in, a promise that we can put our hope in.

We read in our new testament reading "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and destroyed and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home." We can be living lives of holiness and godliness, in accordance with God's promise, awaiting the day that our king Jesus Christ would return for us.

Hark the herald. The Lord is coming. Prepare your hearts for Jesus. Remember your baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of your sins. Our God fulfills his promises to us, so find rest in the hope that Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that we might have our sins forgiven and sit with Him at the right hand of the father in heaven.