

The Announcer's Announcement

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Advent 2: Year B: Mark 1:1-8
December 9-10, 2023

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John the Baptist is the announcer of the coming of Jesus Christ. The whole earth will welcome His arrival! The time of promise has ended and the fulfillment of God's promise (in Jesus Christ) is now! The beginning of the Good News...this news moves us to repent.

ELW 264 Prepare the Royal Highway Verse 1

Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near! Let every hill and valley a level road appear! Then greet the King of glory, foretold in sacred story; Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

At every Passover, faithful Jews would recite the story of the Exodus. The escape through the Red Sea from slavery and oppression under Pharaoh. What a heavy laden life. Then, God led God's people through the wilderness into the promised land. It was a new beginning. It was the beginning of a new chapter in Israel's relationship with God. They knew that story as well as they knew their breathing in and out.

Now, right before their very eyes, John the Baptist is enacting that story outside of Jerusalem. Instead of slaves under Pharaoh, they are the weary oppressed under Rome. They are the cast of characters.¹ "Come through the waters! Come to the water and be baptized to leave behind your old weary, life. There is freedom here.

Leave behind your life of rebellion against a living God. Because,” John says, “there is one coming! Yes, one coming greater than I who is the promised one. The time of waiting is over! It is now a new Exodus, for the Messiah is on the horizon!”

What an announcement! What a declaration! Oh my goodness, people responded to John’s announcement. They came out in droves, dozens and dozens, perhaps hundreds to be baptized by the baptizer. John’s message was clear! “Be ready! He is almost here! He is coming!”

You and I understand announcements. This time of year there are many announcements. We joyfully receive notices of Christmas parties or open houses as spaces to gather with friends. Christmas cards or email letters reveal the changes in people’s lives over the last year: births, deaths, moves or promotions. We eagerly listen to announcers for our favorite footballs teams; whether Taylor Swift is in the house or not. If an uppity-up was coming to town, folks would hurry-scurry to prepare the way. Announcements have a huge impact.

John the Baptist clearly understood his role. He was not the Message. He was the messenger. He was the one to come before...as the announcer of Jesus Christ, the Savior. The mountains would fall down, the valleys would be lifted up. Ready or not, Jesus was on the way.

ELW 264 Verse 2

God’s people, see him coming; your own eternal king! Palm branches strew before him! Spread garments! Shout and sing! God’s promise will not fail you! No more shall doubt assail you! Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God’s word!

For the Jewish folks John was preaching to, they had heard rumors before. Self-proclaimed Messiahs were fairly common. So really? Will this be *the One*?

The explosion of news right out of the gate in the first verses of Mark’s Gospel include the pronouncement of John as Jesus’ announcer.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

This is John's job. God will reveal to people's hearts, through John's words, that this time it's real. The time of promise has ended and now is the fulfillment of the promise. Generations had born and died waiting for Messiah. They had waited and waited and waited. Now was the time! Now was the day!

John's message had an edge. Get ready. Prepare your hearts. Repent. Turn around. There is a living God on the way.

And it's not just preparation for preparation's sake. Some of us polish the silver or vacuum the house when we know the mother-in-law's arrival is imminent. Might not be important to us, but it's important to her, so we hustle to prepare.

Not the way with the Messiah, John says. This is a different kind of groundwork. It's in our spirits. The preparation comes in here. "Repent!" John claims! "I'll wash you with water, but the next one...will bring the Holy Spirit!"

Jesus once said, 'Those who worship, worship in spirit and in truth.' This inner washing, our repentance of ways of living that aren't in line with God...that's spiritual preparation. We need spiritual eyes and ears to see and hear. Sure, we decorate the tree and we carve the turkey. But with what do we decorate our spirits? What do we carve out that opens space for the living God?

God's promise will not fail you! No more shall doubt assail you! This is real! Just as sure as Amazon will deliver the packages to the front door, so will God deliver Jesus to earth. The time of promise is over. The time of fulfillment has arrived!

ELW 264: Verse 3

Then fling the gates wide open to greet your promised king! Your king, yet every nation its tribute too may bring. All lands will bow before him; their voices join your singing: Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

Jesus is coming! What incredible news. Greet your promised king! Every nation and all creation will know. The shepherds will see the stars and hear the angels singing before anyone else. This good news is only the beginning. His arrival will change not only humankind, but creation's future as well.

Regardless, whether we prepare or not, Jesus' arrival is imminent. Isaiah and Mark say, God is on the move, headed towards us. With God this is not an "if you

get ready/then I'll come" scenario. The Messiah's advent is "ready or not, here I come!"ⁱⁱ

Ready or not, here God comes. The valleys will be lifted up, the rough places made into a plain. Wind blowing through the desert hills and through the barren places of our lives. Here comes Messiah. Regardless of what God's people do or don't do. Whew! Grace foretold and grace received. All lands will bow before Him in awe.

Dear friends in Christ, this announcement is only the beginning of the Good News! What God in Jesus brought into the world eons ago, continues on, it begins again this night, and tomorrow night and the next night, into eons yet to come and worlds beyond us.

ELW 642 Verse 4

His is no earthly kingdom; it comes from heav'n above. His rule is peace and freedom and justice, truth and love. So let your praise be sounding for kindness so abounding: Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

Amen

ⁱ N.T. Wright. Mark for Everyone.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revision-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-advent-2/commentary-on-mark-11-8-3>