

Merry Christmas from Sugar Hill Church
Family Devotions for December 20, 2017

Love with the Light

Mark 1:1-8

Instead of having angels, shepherds, or wise men prepare us for Christmas, the Gospel of Mark gives us a weather-beaten prophet wearing camel-hair clothes and a leather belt. This desert prophet, known as John the Baptist, is the first person Mark wants us to meet as he gets ready to tell us the good news. Mark spends no time at all on the stories of the first Christmas. There is simply this announcement: "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (v. 1).

The rugged baptizing preacher is the messenger, and his message is about Jesus, the embodiment of this good news. Jesus is the Son of God, and the story that unfolds is his story.

Mark does not get to Jesus right away because he wants us to pay attention to John's preaching. Standing knee deep in the turbid waters of the Jordan River, John calls out to the crowds gathered along its banks, "Get ready! 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight' [v. 3]."

John's message is a call to make our relationship with God our first priority. We are to do this by confessing our sin and turning in repentance toward God so that we are ready when the Messiah shows up. We need to be listening.

This call reminds us that We need to be preparing our lives to receive Jesus and love Jesus far more than shopping in malls and decorating our homes.

With no baby Jesus, no stable, no star in the sky, Mark launches his good news with these few sentences about the baptizing John and his message about the One who is coming. The message of good news wants us to pay attention to this straightforward statement about getting things right with God. John wants us prepared to meet Jesus, who brings God's peace and goodwill to the world-peace that comes when we are at peace with God and with each other.

Here is why people from all over Judea went out to listen to John, why they traveled far from the centers of power and set aside their daily tasks. They were spiritually hungry.

John's message is a great Christmas message after all--the God people have been seeking is about to come looking for them. Because he is coming, they need to be ready.

John knows that what he is doing is not about himself. His is the voice in the wilderness of our busy and chaotic lives, calling us to get ready for the great coming of God-to prepare our hearts to receive the One who is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The scriptures that shine light on the mysteries of Christmas urge us to find this place of confession and repentance. As we stand there in the desert, on the riverbank with the crowd, we are anxiously looking around for the One about whom John is talking. Christmas warns us that he is not only coming again but is indeed already among us.

Let your prayers be focused on Jesus: "Lord Jesus, thank you for sending us the Christmas message and keep reminding us of the Christmas message of good news and great joy. We love you, Jesus. Amen"