

# Jesus' Preparation for Ministry

*Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:1-13*

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • May 17, 2020 • BSCC

**D**ear Congregation of Christ: Remember the Broadway musical “Godspell”? It premiered in 1971 and a movie by the same title came out in 1973 and was last shown in 2012. What was “Godspell” all about? It was supposedly based on the Gospel of Matthew, but Jesus is a hippie and a clown, the Hindu Lord of the Dance. He was a gentle, moral teacher. He had eight disciples: four men, four women. John the Baptist was not beheaded but continued to follow Jesus until he transformed into Judas Iscariot and forgiven by his Master! No reason was shown why Jesus was executed in a bloodless crucifixion. The show ended with his eight disciples carrying his dead body. A total blasphemy against God.

The title of this musical and film comes from the Old English word “godspel,” which means good news or good story. Our word “evangelism” comes from the root word “evangel,” which is taken from a Greek word that means “good news.” So, “gospel” and “evangel” mean the same thing. The Gospel of Mark begins with this introduction, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark’s book is the “gospel” of our Lord, or the good news of the coming Jesus the Son of God. Unlike Paul’s letters full of doctrines, instructions and exhortations, Mark’s Gospel is a narrative. Though it is the second Gospel in our New Testament, Mark was possibly written first about 25-30 years after Jesus’ resurrection.

Before we begin, let us briefly look at the background of this Gospel. The author, as the majority of scholars agree, is a man named Mark. Mark is mentioned in Acts 12:12 and 25 as Jesus’ disciple, and whose other name is John, so he is also called John Mark. Her mother’s name is Mary, but not the same Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mark was a close associate of the Apostle Peter, therefore, the source of most of his narratives was Peter. When Paul went on his first missionary journey, Mark and Barnabbas were his companions. But there was a disagreement between Paul and Mark, causing them to separate (Acts 15:36-41). However, Paul and Mark later reconciled (2 Tim 4:11). Some traditions say that Mark established the church in Egypt, called the Coptic church, and was martyred in Alexandria.

Who were Mark’s main audience? He wrote it to all, Jews and non-Jews, although he sometimes explains Hebrew words and Jewish traditions to his non-Jew readers. He wanted to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, as his book begins and ends with this truth (1:1; 16:7). Whereas Matthew and Luke traces Jesus’ genealogy to King David to prove that he is the rightful heir to the throne of David, Mark quickly and directly says that Jesus is the Son of God. His narrative is fast-paced, using the word “immediately” at each of Jesus’ works. Therefore, he focuses on Jesus’ actions, not words. Mark is different from the other three Gospels, in that there is hardly any theological teachings from Jesus. He also focuses on the passion of our Lord, devoting five out of sixteen chapters to these events. Another main theme of the book is the cost

of discipleship: sufferings and persecution, even martyrdom. Finally, Mark also focuses on “kingdom of God” or “kingdom,” using it 25 times in his narrative.

After that brief biblical and historical background, let us go to our text this morning. Our theme is, **Jesus’ Preparation for Ministry**. In these first thirteen verses, we see his preparation for his earthly ministry. We have three main points; first, **Prepared by a Messenger**; second, **Prepared by Baptism**; and third, **Prepared by Temptation**.

### **Prepared by a Messenger**

Mark writes the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is the gospel? Many evangelicals can’t even define what it is. The Apostle Paul has the definition, “*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*” (1 Cor 15:3-4). The gospel is the good news that Jesus died, was buried and rose again from the dead to save us from our sins. It is not living for Christ or obeying his commandments.

Then, Mark declares the Jesus is the Son of God. It is this truth that he will prove all throughout his book, ending in the centurion’s statement at the crucifixion, “Truly, this man was the Son of God” (15:39). All the signs and wonders that Jesus did during his earthly ministry attested to his divinity as the Son of God and the Son of Man.

His first argument is directed toward his Jewish readers when he quotes both Malachi and Isaiah. Malachi prophesied that the LORD will send his messenger who will prepare his way before he comes. Every king will send a herald to a city before he arrives, so the city could prepare for this glorious and momentous event. The Jews had been waiting for another prophet for 400 years since Malachi was the last of the old covenant prophets. His announcement was that the LORD would come to judge his people. Also, according to Isaiah, this messenger will also be preaching the coming of the King in the wilderness. This King who would comfort his people by delivering them from their sins. In verse 4, Mark says that John baptized and preached in the wilderness. Therefore, by quoting both prophets, Mark was bridging the Old Testament messenger and the arrival of the LORD. The LORD will come to judge and to deliver.

John was the messenger. He was described as wearing camel’s hair and a leather belt, eating locusts and honey, and preaching in the desert. This was a reference to Elijah who was sent to the wilderness by God because King Ahab wanted to kill him. Elijah also wore camel’s hair and a leather belt (2 Kgs 1:8). In the desert, he was fed by the ravens (1 Kgs 17:1-6). Malachi also prophesied that Elijah would return before the Messiah’s coming (Mal 4:5-6). Later, Mark writes that the disciples of Jesus asked him why the scribes teach that Elijah will return. Jesus answered that Elijah had already come and the Jews “*did to him whatever they pleased,*” by which he meant that Herod beheaded him (Mark 9:13).

John the messenger also made himself nothing compared with Jesus the LORD. He is not worthy to even untie his sandals, a duty for servants and slaves alone. John is a servant of Jesus, because Jesus is the mighty God (7). John also taught that while he baptized with water, Jesus will baptize with the Spirit (8). Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the old covenant prophets that the LORD

will pour out his Spirit upon his people, as we just studied in Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28; Isa 44:3; Ezk 36:27). Water symbolizes the Holy Spirit, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, *"unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5). And on Pentecost Sunday, Jesus poured out his Spirit on his disciples (Acts 2:17). So also, Christ has poured out his Spirit on all of us who have believed and trusted in him alone, and now he indwells us with the Spirit (Rom 8:9, 11).

### **Prepared by Baptism**

So, Mark writes, *"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"* (4). The baptisms performed by John on the Jews were to prepare them for the arrival of the Messiah. Before the Messiah comes, they were to repent and purify themselves of their sins, symbolically done by cleansing with water. Many people believe that Jesus' baptism by John is a Christian baptism. However, it is not, for Jesus had no sin, so he did not need a baptism of repentance. In his baptism, he identified with his people, with you and me, sinners who need their Savior's perfect righteousness. Paul confirms this when he said, *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Cor 5:21).

Jesus' baptism was his ordination to his earthly ministry of saving his people from their sins. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests and kings were anointed with oil to ratify their callings. Jesus was not anointed with oil, but with water, signifying his anointing by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah. And when he was baptized, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and his Father in heaven confirmed him as the Divine Son of God, *"You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased"* (11). Mark is pointing his readers back to Psalm 2:7, *"You are my Son, today I have begotten you."* His whole life and his sacrifice on the cross were pleasing to his Father because he was perfectly obeyed all the way to the cross (Phil 2:7). If he was not, he is disqualified to be our Savior. Note also that the three Persons of the Trinity were present in his baptism: God the Father spoke from heaven and God the Spirit descended upon the Son. Therefore, in his baptism, Jesus identified with both his people and with God the Father. He is fully man and fully God in one Person.

As God empowered Jesus with the Holy Spirit, so he empowers all of us believers. The Spirit indwells us and prepares us for our difficult pilgrimage in this life of temptations, disappointments, bitterness, loneliness, sufferings and afflictions such as the present epidemic. He gives us patience and strength of faith to endure to the end, knowing that we will receive our final heavenly reward.

### **Prepared by Temptation**

Jesus identified with his people, particularly in being tempted by the devil. The writer of Hebrews says, *"For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted"* (2:18); and, *"one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb 4:15). He is fully human in all aspects of humanity, but he is uniquely the only sinless man who ever walked on earth.

In Mark's narrative, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is very brief, two verses. Only a few details are given. How Satan tempted him is not revealed. We only read about the three temptations in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. First, Mark only says that the Spirit himself

drove him into the wilderness for the purpose of testing him through Satan's lies. This does not mean that God tempts a person to sin. God does not (Jas 1:13). The temptation was meant to strengthen Jesus in his spiritual battle against Satan all throughout his earthly ministry. Second, he was "being tempted by Satan" for forty days, which means that all those forty days, he was in the grip of temptations. Third, he was with "wild animals." And fourth, the angels ministered to him.

Again, this temptation narrative takes us back to the Old Testament. As early as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Satan tried to thwart God's eternal plan to have a perfectly holy and righteous people for himself. What are the contrasts in Adam's and Jesus' temptations? Adam was in the paradise of God, a perfect environment with all kinds of food to eat, while Jesus was in a hot, barren wilderness. Adam had beautiful animals around him, while Jesus was surrounded by wild beasts. Adam was tempted only once in one day, while Jesus was tempted for forty days. Yet, Adam failed his test, while Jesus passed his with a perfect score. This temptation also recalls the Israelites' temptations in the wilderness for forty years. They failed again and again, so Jesus is the one who would fulfill what Israel failed to do—all his life and to his death. This is why he spoke of his life as a second "exodus" or departure into death in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).

The endings were also contrasting. While Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise into a world tainted by sin because of their disobedience, Jesus drove out Satan and was rewarded by being brought into heaven by angels as a result of his perfect obedience. And it is not only him who will get this inheritance, but also all of us who overcome Satan's temptations to the end. This is why Paul says, "*For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous*" (Rom 5:19). This first temptation was also Satan's first defeat at the hands of the Son of God. Jesus will hand him defeat after defeat all throughout his earthly ministry, the ultimate and greatest defeat being his death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:54-56).

**B**eloved brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven as the Son of God to assume human flesh and blood. In addition to his divine nature, he put on a human nature. Like John, Christ's herald of the good news of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, we too are ambassadors for Christ. As his lowly servants, he has entrusted us with a ministry of reconciliation to witness for him (2 Cor 5:20). He has empowered us to this task by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

By the indwelling of the Spirit, he also gives us strength and perseverance to endure through temptations, sufferings, sorrows and afflictions. Then, as God was pleased with the finished work of Jesus in his perfect life and atoning death, we too will be raised up to heaven as our reward.

**Let us pray:** Our Father in heaven, we have begun to read, study and meditate on this wonderful and vivid Gospel of Mark. Therefore, we pray that we might give praise, honor and thanksgiving to you and him for the salvation that you have given us undeserving sinners. Help us by your Spirit to flee from temptations, be faithful witnesses for our Savior, and persevere through the sufferings to the end of our days, for it is in his name we pray. Amen.