



# ADVENT 2B - BIBLE STUDY

What happens in the wilderness ...

## Abstract

- 1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:  
"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way" —  
3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'"  
Mark 1:1–3

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## Advent 2B - Bible Study

### What happens in the wilderness ...

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2020 | ADVENT | SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT | YEAR B

Old Testament    Isaiah 40:1–11  
 Psalm            Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13  
 New Testament    2 Peter 3:8–15a  
 Gospel            Mark 1:1–8<sup>i</sup>

#### Mark 1.1-8

Mark introduces his story of the life of Jesus as ‘good news’. But before getting to the content of that good news, he presents John, a messenger sent to prepare the way, who baptizes people in the wilderness.

**This week's resources explore:** how Mark introduces the good news of Jesus.<sup>ii</sup>

## Welcome and opening prayer

### A gathering prayer

People went to deserted places  
     to hear what was most important.  
 Gathered here today, we would light a second candle  
     as a symbol of our pilgrimage  
 towards the things that will last for ever:  
     righteousness, loving-kindness,  
     peace and an eternal home in you, O God,  
 who calls all things towards the fullness of life.  
 Amen.

## Reading

### Readings

#### Mark 1:1–8

**1** The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, <sup>2</sup> as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
 who will prepare your way” —

<sup>3</sup> “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
 make straight paths for him.’ ”

<sup>4</sup> And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>iii</sup>

*respond*

For the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

## Exegesis

The Gospel passage opens with a very bold and assertive statement: ‘The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ – yet we hear nothing from this Jesus until verse 15. Instead, we get a story of an eccentric man who is found in the wilderness. We are being introduced to the reality that the beginning of ‘good news’ is almost always a messenger!

The Old Testament quotation is, in fact, an amalgam of verses from Malachi (3.1) and Isaiah (40.3). The second half of the Malachi verse is omitted, perhaps because it has a reference to the Temple. This omission here would signal to observant listeners that something new is happening. Rather than in the Temple, John the Baptizer’s work as the beginning of the ‘good news’ takes place in the wilderness. Indeed, Mark records that people from Jerusalem were coming to the wilderness to have their sins dealt with. But why, if you lived in Jerusalem, would you go out to the wilderness for forgiveness, when you have the Temple just round the corner, whose whole purpose is to deal with sin? These early verses of Mark establish a conflict between wilderness and the Temple; between voice and ritual; between Jesus and Jerusalem.

The wilderness is, at the same time, a place of flight, struggle, lostness and hunger, and one of new beginnings and birth. In the archetypal story of the Exodus, the people flee slavery into the wilderness and experience all sorts of lack; but it was also the place where they were formed as the people of God. The end of this week’s passage leaves readers in a form of wilderness, an in-between space. We have been told that this is the beginning, but we are shown a strangely dressed man in the scrubland, miles from anywhere. We want to know Jesus, but we have to wait – because the messenger comes first. An encouragement, perhaps, to reflect on the role of wilderness in our own lives; the space between captivity and promised land – and a fitting reading for Advent.

## Picture pointers

**‘Why do you think Mark began his Gospel with John the Baptist?’**

- Why do you think Mark began his with John the Baptist?
- If you want to tell someone about Jesus, where would you begin?
- How would you summarise the gospel in one sentence?



## Live your faith

Remembering Jesus’ time in the wilderness, find/make time this week (ideally, about an hour) to disconnect from the world (e.g. turn off your phone; sit quietly or go for a walk alone). Try not think too much; just listen for God.

## A sending out prayer

We have gathered around stories of strange people in wild places.

For you, O Lord, no desert is a desert only.

It is a place where wild things grow and nurture us,  
in all the places of our lives.

Nurture us, as we go,  
so that we can find more nurture,  
and be more nurture,  
in all abandoned places.

Because you see life and light where we do not.

And so we follow your light into all places.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Revised Common Lectionary. (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

<sup>ii</sup> Some resources used are copyright © ROOTS for Churches Ltd. Reproduced with permission.

<sup>iii</sup> [Revised Common Lectionary](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.