

Unfolding the Word

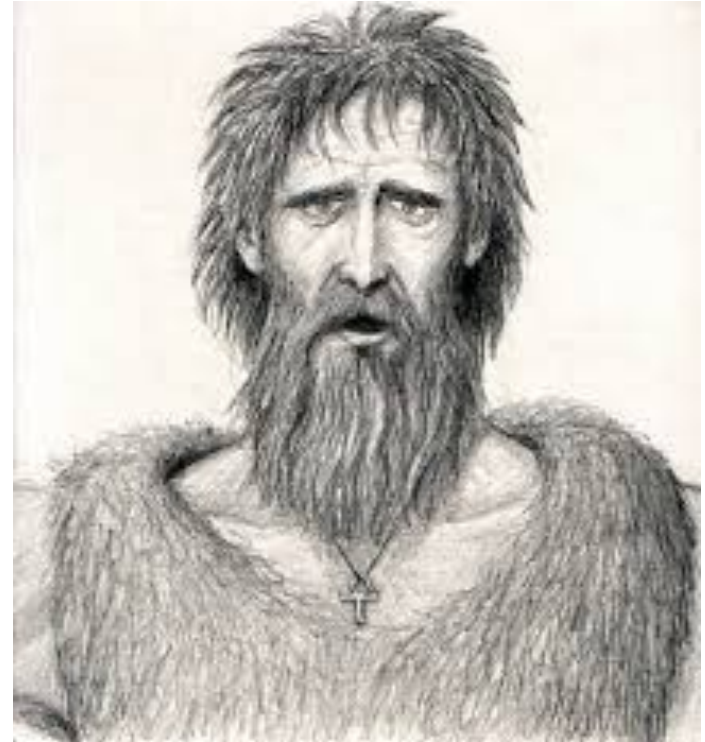
Advent

Life Is an Advent Season

Life is a constant Advent season: we are continually waiting to become, to discover, to complete, to fulfill. Hope, struggle, fear, expectation and fulfillment are all part of our Advent experience.

The world is not as just, not as loving, not as whole as we know it can and should be. But the coming of Christ and his presence among us—as one of us—give us reason to live in hope: that light will shatter the darkness, that we can be liberated from our fears and prejudices, that we are never alone or abandoned.

May this Advent season be a time for bringing hope, transformation and fulfillment into the Advent of our lives.



Notes: Mark 1:1-8

This is the beginning of Mark's Gospel. There is no infancy narrative and no Christmas story. In his first sentence Mark gives us a summary of his Gospel: it's the good news of Jesus Christ (the Messiah or Saviour) the Son of God. Then we go straight into the adult life of Jesus.

The Gospel begins with the story of John the Baptist. He was a desert preacher, probably at one of the more popular crossing points on the river Jordan. He was also a God-sent prophet, herald or messenger. Mark compares John the Baptist to Isaiah, even in his dress and in his message. Isaiah lived during the time when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon. He preached that God would bring an end to the exile, the Israelites would return to the promised land, re-build the temple and live in peace. Like Isaiah, John is saying here that God is again going to intervene in Israel's history. He (John) is pleading with the Israelites to turn away from their godless behaviour and living. His baptism ('Repentance for the forgiveness of sins') is more than regret for individual actions in one's past - he wants them to make a conscious and deliberate return or conversion towards God and to live out their new lives in that commitment.

Mark doesn't explain how people are to live out that commitment but if we look at Luke's description of John the Baptist, he gives us very clear guidelines. He wants people to change their way of living.

John the Baptist is adamant that he is not the Messiah – he is to announce the Messiah/Christ. He is announcing the coming of Jesus Christ, a prophet whose sandals

he is not worthy to tie or untie. In John's preaching, Jesus will perform mighty miracles and will baptise with the Holy Spirit – not just with the water of John's own baptism. The Holy Spirit is associated with creation, recreation or renewal. Jesus will usher in the new salvation from God.

John, in Mark's view, accomplished his task – 'the whole district of Judea flocked to him, together with everyone from Jerusalem'. In fact, he was so popular that Herod had him shut up in prison (Luke 3: 19) and, later, beheaded – a stark warning to Jesus of the fate of God's prophets.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis had plenty to say about how we should treat others. He asks us (the more fortunate) "to renounce some of our rights so as to place them more generously at the service of others" (190).

The Pope challenges us to "run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others". He has in mind the sick, the suffering, the elderly, the hungry, the outsider, the lonely, the migrant, the asylum seeker, etc.....

In the Pope's mind, we must especially be open to bringing God's care and compassion to those who are in need. "They need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care." (200)