

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son-of-God.”

With these brief words, Mark begins his gospel account. It's like an announcer who comes onto the stage to command the attention of the theater audience, signaling the curtains to open and the drama begin.

Mark's gospel narrative starts so abruptly. There are no angel visitations, no miraculous pregnancies, birth stories, nor manger guests! If we had only Mark's gospel account, there would be no Christmas pageants or carols or cards! Think of that! Perhaps though, we would have John-The-Baptizer Dolls or Locust Cake instead of fruit cake.

So why does Mark start this way? Certainly he knows what Luke and Matthew know about the stunning promises to Zechariah and Elizabeth of a son named John. He knows about Joseph and Mary, heard about the before-wedlock-conception of Jesus, about the angel choruses, amazed shepherds and the curious Magi from the east!

Mark, for some reason, was not interested in the details of how this came to pass, but only that it had. That the messiah, the one hoped for, the prince of peace, was indeed at hand and was in their midst. This news was too good, too important, too compelling, to get lost in the details.

And, it wasn't a 'doomsday' announcement of the end of history. This was the *good news* of God's purposes from of old being fulfilled; it was about what God was up to in Jesus. There was nothing more significant for Mark than to say, "Here is your God!"

For Mark the psalmist's words, ***steadfast love and faithfulness have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*** ARE fulfilled in Jesus. (Ps. 85:10)

For Mark, John the baptizer WAS Isaiah's ***voice of one crying in the wilderness***, the announcer who ran onto the stage to capture the attention of the audience.

Thus begins the Markan narrative and the drama of how the God of steadfast love, infinite mercy and justice, of abiding patience and forgiving grace has come among us and is now revealed in Jesus the Christ! That was a story for the world that had to get out - fast.

In a world continuously in hope of a savior - someone or some system - to bring equity and justice among people and nations, a world of precious little mercy, where forgiveness and love are often given grudgingly, where patience is thin at best, this was and is indeed good news to our ears.

Mark has heard Isaiah's insistent, double imperative, ***Comfort, O comfort my people***. This *good news* will be the voice that will ***speak tenderly*** (literal Hebrew: *speak to the heart*) to Jerusalem, to any, and all.

That very same voice calls out to you and me in this Advent season. That voice is seeking to engage us, turn our hearts and minds and bodies away from the "wilderness" of our fear-filled lives, anxious and restless, and turn toward the One who is at hand and has spoken tenderly, ***turn to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest***.

Mark wanted to get the good news out fast so that everyone who heard it would know, however haltingly, that in every present moment there is the promise of a new beginning, a *manger* (if you will) bearing hope to heart and home!

Come to Christ's table, feast upon this good news in form of bread and wine. Open your heart to it and let it comfort you and awaken the Spirit within you.

Then go out and give voice to and be a messenger of this promise, and embody it where you live and work.