



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

## Chapter 1

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# Introduction

- The Gospel according to St. Mark begins with a Prologue in verses 1:1-13
- The Prologue serves as an introduction/preparation for Jesus Christ's public ministry
- St. Mark does not provide a birth narrative nor does he provide Jesus' genealogy that is found in the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke
- Mark 1:1 serves as the title for the entire book, and establishes the authority of God in the unfolding events of the Gospel according to St. Mark in the first three verses



# Introduction

- God has determined the narrative and uses the inspired writer to record it, beginning with the statement of Jesus Christ's true identity and the Old Testament prophecy that is fulfilled in the Advent of the Messiah
- This is followed by three events that are the preparation for Jesus' teaching ministry
  1. The appearance of St. John the Baptist in the Judean wilderness as the forerunner of the Christ according to the promise of the Old Testament prophets, 1:2-8



# Introduction

2. The baptism of Jesus and the first revelation of the Most Holy Trinity, 1:9-11
  3. The temptation of Jesus, the "second Adam," by Satan, 1:12-13
- St. Mark will use the Greek word *euthus/eutheos* many times in the Greek text of the first chapter
  - It is the key word in the Gospel according to St. Mark and is an adverb that can be translated as "immediately, now, at once, or straightaway"



# Introduction

## Chapter Outline:

- John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8
- John Baptizes Jesus 1:9-11
- Satan Tempts Jesus 1:12-13
- Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry 1:14-15
- Four Fishermen Called as Disciples 1:16-20
- Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28
- Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed 1:29-31
- Many Healed After Sabbath Sunset 1:32-34
- Preaching in Galilee 1:35-39
- Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- The Evangelist begins this gospel by announcing its theme “*The gospel of Jesus Christ*,” that is the good news to the world, the salvation presented by Jesus Christ
- The word "gospel" literally signifies good news, and particularly the good tidings respecting the way of salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ
- The Gospel according to St. Mark, like the Gospel according to St. John, echoes Genesis 1:1
- It is an echo of God's original creative design

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- The Advent of the Messiah is a new beginning of what will become a new creation event
- Some have understood the word "gospel" here to mean "history" or "life - the beginning of the history," etc.
- But St. Mark says nothing of the early life of the Savior
- The word "gospel" here has reference rather to the preaching of John, an account of which immediately follows, and means the beginning of the good news, or annunciation respecting the Messiah

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- It was very customary thus to prefix a title to a book
- The "good news" is that Jesus is the Son of God!
- It is as though what St. Mark presents in this book is not merely a parade of past incidents, but rather good news for every soul that encounters Jesus as being the "Savior"
- He is the Son of God, who is the only One able, by His unique sacrifice, to raise us to His Father's bosom and reconcile us as children of God

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- Historically, it has been the custom for kings and emperors, to send someone to prepare their ways for them
- Similarly, the Lord Jesus Christ a while back proclaimed through His prophets about His forerunner, 'John the Baptist,' being the "angel of the Lord," and the voice crying in the wilderness
- St. John the Baptist is here styled an angel, on account of his angelic life, and extraordinary sanctity
- Mark mentions "prophets" here without specifying which
- The places are found in Malachi 3:1, and in Isaiah 40:3

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- In the beginning of this gospel, St. Mark assert the authority of the prophets, that he might persuade every one, both Jew and Gentile, to receive with willingness the authority of the prophets
- But what is meant by, *Who will prepare Your way*, is, that St. John is to prepare the minds of the Jews, by his baptism and preaching, to receive their Messiah

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- They were to repent and be baptized in reference to the remission of sins
- Repentance prepared the soul for it, and Baptism was the type or pledge of it
- The theme of his preaching was “the baptism of repentance,” to enjoy the remission of sins
- The ritual of water purification was a religious practice used for being purified from that which was ritually unclean, Numbers: 19 and Exodus 19:9-11

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- Some commentators think from this that the baptism of John remitted sins, though he says in Matthew 3:11, “*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,*” to show that he did not baptize with the Holy Spirit, without which there is no remission of sin
- St. Ambrose says, “The water and the Spirit are inseparable; the baptism of repentance differs from that of grace, which embraces the two together; while the former concerns only one. If the body and the soul take part in sin, so sanctification is required for both.”

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- The people coming to John for his ritual cleansing by water saw that he dressed in the same manner as the prophet Elijah
- When the angel Gabriel announced John's birth he told John's father Zechariah that John was to be filled with the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah
- The people knew this was the prophet, according to the prophecy of Malachi, who was to be the forerunner to the Messiah
- John lived a life of hardship in the desert

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- The Baptist is preparing the way by cleansing the people in preparation of the ministry of Jesus the Messiah, Son of God
- Jesus is the greater and John the lesser
- Notice that Mark presents the Baptist according to his mission: he points the way to God the Son and then he fades away to give prominence to Jesus
- St. Ambrose says; “John did not mean, by that comparison, to prove that Christ is greater than him; because there is no point in concerning the Son of God to any human being.”

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- By St. John's proclamation that he was unworthy to stoop down and loose His sandal strap, he referred to his inability to apprehend the secret of Christ's Incarnation: How could the Word of God become man?
- Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus Christ bowed His head beneath his humble hand
- St. John Chrysostom says; "The hand that he confirmed to be unworthy of loosing His sandal strap, Christ allowed it to be put on His head."

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way 1:1-8



- To untie a master's sandals was considered a demeaning task that was not required by a Jewish servant
- To be unworthy of such a task would be to lower oneself below the status of a slave
- *I indeed baptized you with water*, It was spoken to the baptized persons, partly to take off their dependence upon him and his baptism; and partly to direct their views to Christ, from whom the gifts and graces of the Spirit are alone to be given
- *baptize you with the Holy Spirit*, Inwardly washing away their sins with His blood, and sanctifying their hearts



# John Baptizes Jesus 1:9-11

- St. Mark does not provide the details of Jesus' baptism that are found in the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke
- In the Gospel according to St. John, the event is not described at all; we only hear of it after the fact
- St. Mark presents to us the Baptism of the Lord, preceding His public ministry, to proclaim the ultimate goal of His ministry and salvation work
- *Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee*, The place where He had been brought up, and lived, and dwelt in from His infancy to this time



# John Baptizes Jesus 1:9-11

- *And immediately*, a favorite word of St. Mark
- Coming up from the water confirms that the Lord Jesus Christ based baptism on plunging into water, to emphasize our communion with Him through His burial in the grave and also our resurrection with Him
- He who ascended out of the water must first have descended into it
- The opening of the gates of Heaven at Jesus' baptism that had been closed since the Fall of Adam marks the beginning of the new era



# John Baptizes Jesus 1:9-11

- God resides above in the heavenly Sanctuary and human history takes place below, but now the opening up of the access to heaven promises a new intimacy with God not enjoyed by man since before the Fall of Adam
- The Gospel according to St. Mark, like the other Synoptic Gospels, presents the first revelation of the Most Holy Trinity to mankind at Jesus' baptism



# John Baptizes Jesus 1:9-11

- What needs to be confirmed is that what the Lord did here was neither out of need nor for His benefit
- He was baptized in the name of the whole Church, on our behalf, to raise us up from our sins, bringing us to the glory of His inheritance, being the Only-Begotten Son
- St. Ambrose says in his interpretation of the Gospel according to St. Luke: "The Lord was baptized, not to get purified, but to purify the water. As Christ, Who knew no sin, descended into the water, it gained the power to purify everyone who is buried therein, casting away his sins in it."



# Satan Tempts Jesus 1:12-13

- *Immediately*, St. Mark used this word very often
- God's plan for Jesus continues to unfold:
  - a. The Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the desert
  - b. Satan tempts Jesus
  - c. Jesus defeats Satan's temptations
  - d. Angels minister to Him in the midst of wild beasts, showing Jesus' authority over heaven and earth
- Like Adam and Eve, Jesus is tested by Satan



# Satan Tempts Jesus 1:12-13

- But then the parallel experiences differ
- Jesus is the new Adam who resists Satan's temptations
- He is the new Adam of the new Creation, and like the first Adam who was tested by Satan concerning the obedience of his covenant obligation to God in the Garden of Eden, Jesus experiences the test of a covenant ordeal
- The failure of Adam brought death and alienation from God, but the victory of Jesus will bring eternal life and union with the Holy Trinity



# Satan Tempts Jesus 1:12-13

- Mark does not give the details of the three times Satan tempted Jesus, but he added that Jesus *was with the wild beasts*
- The word *drove* does not mean that He was compelled forcibly against His will to go there, but that He was inclined to go there by the Spirit, or was led there
- The Spirit of God, for important purposes, caused Him to go

# Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry 1:14-15



- Jesus left Judea and went into the more retired country of Galilee
- He supposed that if He remained in Judea, Herod would also persecute Him and attempt to take His life
- His time of death had not come, and He therefore prudently sought safety in retirement
- Hence, we may learn that when we have great duties to perform for the church of God, we are not to endanger our lives wantonly
- When we can secure them without a sacrifice of principle, we are to do it

# Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry 1:14-15



- John the Baptist was arrested by Herod Antipas
- He was the son of Herod the Great and ruler of the Galilee and also Perea on the east side of the Jordan River where John was baptizing
- John's arrest was the signal that John's ministry had come to an end and Jesus' ministry must begin
- The theme of the Lord's missionary work was the fulfillment of time, that is, the time for the appearance of the Messiah, the time so long foretold, has come
- The kingdom which had been shut for so many ages was now to be reopened by the preaching and the death of Christ

# Four Fishermen Called as Disciples 1:16-20



- The Lord Jesus Christ came, not only to minister personally to humanity, but to ordain disciples who would carry His same Spirit, to work by them and minister through them
- St. Mark narrates to us about how the Lord called four of these disciples among illiterate fishermen: Simon, Andrew, James and John; the two sons of Zebedee
- He chose them illiterate, as stated by Origen and by St. Jerome, in order not to refer their achievements to their own eloquence and philosophy, but to the divine work in them.

# Four Fishermen Called as Disciples 1:16-20



- The Lord called them up in two groups along the shore of the Sea of Galilee - a fresh-water lake, 13 miles long, bordered by Galilee on the west side
- Also known as the Lake of Gennesaret, and the Lake of Tiberias, according to the names of the surrounding provinces
- Fr. Theophlactius believed that Simon and Andrew, disciples of John the Baptist, John 1:35-40, followed the Lord Christ when they heard their teacher bearing witness to Him, but come back periodically to help their aged father. Thus what was mentioned in the Gospel according to St. Mark was not their first encounter with the Lord

# Four Fishermen Called as Disciples 1:16-20



- The calling of James and John
- Two brothers had already been called and two more were now to join them
- It might seem unnatural, had they left their father alone in the ship, to have taken the care and management of it, and therefore it is added, "with the hired servants"; who were hired for that purpose, to assist in mending the nets, and casting them, and managing the ship
- It may also indicate that they were not poor but were probably well-to-do since they had hired men who worked for them

# Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28



- *and immediately*, The frequent recurrence of this adverb
- It occurs forty-one times in the Gospel; nine times in this first chapter
- In the synagogue, the presiding elder, after reading the Scriptures, invited anyone who chose to address the people, Acts 13:15
- Though our Savior was not a "priest" of the Levitical order or an "officer" of the synagogue, yet we find Him often taking advantage of this privilege, and delivering His doctrines to the Jews

# Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28



- He did not go about to establish what He said by the authority of the Rabbis
- But He spoke as from Himself, as one sent of God, that had an authority from Him, and was independent of man; and this was what they had not observed in others, and wonder at it

# Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28



- *an unclean spirit*, So entirely under demoniacal power
- That is to say, possessed with an evil spirit
- The devil is called an unclean spirit in opposition to the Spirit of God, which is the Holy Spirit
- The man that had this unclean spirit, or rather the unclean spirit in the man, cries out, *Let us alone! What have we to do with You*
- He doubtless feared what followed, particularly that he should be cast out
- He counts himself destroyed when he cannot do harm

# Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28



- He cried out through fear of the majesty of Christ, whose presence he could not bear
- And through grief and envy at the success of His ministration, and the influence it had upon the minds of men; and through fear of being dispossessed of the man, in whom he was
- *the Holy One of God!*” He whom God had called His Holy One, Psalm 16:10

# Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28



- *rebuked him*, Though he had borne testimony to Christ, yet his testimony is not accepted
- The author of truth could not bear the father of lies to bear testimony of Him
- It was necessary that our Lord should at once assert His absolute power over the evil spirits; and not only this, but also that He should show that He had nothing to do with them
- It is both here and in many other places observable, that when the devil made a confession of Jesus Christ, yet neither Jesus Christ nor His apostles would ever take any notice of it

# Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28



- Truth is never advantaged from the confession of known liars, as the devil was from the beginning
- Jesus Christ needed not the devil's testimony, either to His holiness, or His being the Son of God
- Nor was He to be imposed upon by the devil's good words
- He was to make no peace with him, but to destroy him and his works, He therefore charges him to come out
- This is not the kind of witness Jesus wants to His true identity, and it is necessary for His identity to be revealed slowly through His acts and His teaching

# Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit 1:21-28



- The people that were in the synagogue, who were met together for divine worship, were astonished, not only at His doctrine, as before, but at this miracle and power of His in casting out devils
- Jesus did it in His own name and by His own authority
- This proved that He was superior to all the unclean spirits
- In consequence, Jesus' fame spread throughout all the country, and the impression became prevalent that he was the Messiah

# Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed 1:29-31



- *as soon as*, Again we have St. Mark's characteristic word, as in the "immediately"
- St. Ambrose's view is that Simon's mother-in-law refers to our body, attacked by the various fevers of sins, turning it into a captive of pain, cast down without work; in need of a physician to release it from the bonds of sickness
- St. John Chrysostom notices that the Lord Jesus Christ was coming out of the synagogue in Capernaum, heading to Simon's house to eat; proving that by the words of the evangelist: "...*the fever left her, and she served them*" (verse 31)

# Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed 1:29-31



- That house was open to serve the Master, so the Master came to serve it
- It is as though whenever we serve the Lord Jesus Christ we are, in fact, getting His service, and enjoying His exalted work in us
- The lesson for us is that when she is healed, she immediately rises and serves the Lord
- Our love for the Lord and our gratitude should be demonstrated by our actions

# Many Healed After Sabbath Sunset 1:32-34



- *At evening*, An exact specification of time for the purpose of indicating that the close of the Sabbath had occurred
- According to them, it was unlawful to bring their sick to Jesus for a cure during the Sabbath hours
- The Jews were still unable to understand the spiritual concept of the Sabbath as a day of repose, during which wearied souls could find healing
- So they waited until the Sabbath came to an end by the sunset

# Many Healed After Sabbath Sunset 1:32-34



- *the whole city*, That is, the sick and those who brought them, and the wondering spectators
- This indicates the presence of an eye-witness
- *at the door*, of Peter's house
- Not that there were some, who had some sorts of diseases, whom He did not heal; but He healed all that came, or were brought to Him, which were many, of every sort of disease, which were divers, with which they were afflicted

# Many Healed After Sabbath Sunset 1:32-34



- In Matthew 8:16 it is said, "He cast out the spirits with a word"; or rather, a word of command
- "The devils knew that it was Christ, who had been promised for so many ages before; for they saw Him perform the wonders which the prophets had foretold of Him; yet they were not perfectly acquainted with His divine nature, or otherwise they never would have persecuted to death and crucified the Lord of glory." St. Augustine



# Preaching in Galilee 1:35-39

- *a long while before daylight*, Literally, very early, while it was yet night
- The note of time is peculiar to St. Mark
- Another graphic touch of the Evangelist
- He brings the scene before our eyes
- The previous day had been a long day of conflict with and victory over the kingdom of sin and death
- He now retires to refresh Himself in the heaven of prayer, in communion with His Father



# Preaching in Galilee 1:35-39

- If Jesus felt it was necessary to devote time to private prayer, shouldn't we do the same?
- *searched for Him*, Followed him eagerly
- They had now begun to taste the good word of God, and thought they could never hear too much of it
- *Everyone is looking for You*, Some to hear; some to be healed; some to be saved; and some, perhaps, through no good motive
- There are all sorts of followers; but how few walk steadily, and persevere unto the end!



# Preaching in Galilee 1:35-39

- The word translated *towns* occurs here only
- It is a compound word, “village cities,” and seems to have been made up to express the character of such places as Bethsaida, Chorazin, and others on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which were more than “villages,” yet could hardly be classed as “cities”
- *for this purpose I have come forth*, To preach the Gospel to every creature, that all might hear, and fear, and return unto the Lord
- The towns and the villages will not come to the preacher - the preacher must go to them, if he desires their salvation



# Preaching in Galilee 1:35-39

- In this, also, Jesus has left His ministering servants an example, that they should follow His steps
- Every minister of God must not think he has delivered his own soul, till he has made an offer of salvation to every city and village within his reach
- *throughout all Galilee*, Taking every town and city in His circuit, He continued preaching the Gospel of the kingdom in one place and another, until He had gone over the whole country



# Preaching in Galilee 1:35-39

- He continued proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to all - there was no time to be lost
- Immortal souls were perishing for lack of knowledge; and the grand adversary was prowling about, seeking whom he might devour
- This zealous, affectionate, and persevering diligence of Christ should be copied by all His servants in the ministry; it is not less necessary now than it was then
- Thousands, thousands of Christians, so called, are perishing for lack of knowledge



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- *Now a leper came to Him*, After He has come down from a certain mountain, in Galilee, where He had been preaching to the people, Matthew 8:1, and when He was in a certain city, Luke 5:12, either Capernaum, or some other city of Galilee
- This man was full of leprosy, as Luke says, and very probably deemed incurable; of the nature and symptoms of the leprosy, Luke 5:12
- *kneeling down to Him*, In token of submission, respect, and reverence, and to worship Him
- He knelt down to Him, proclaiming his submission, physically and spiritually



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- The scriptural idea of worship is associated with some lowly posture of the body
- But with this worship of the body, the leper offered also the homage of the soul
- His prostration of himself before Jesus Christ was not merely a rendering of honor to an earthly being; it was a rendering of reverence to a Divine Being
- For he does not say to him, "If You will ask of God, he will give it You;" but he says, *If You are willing, You can make me clean*



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- I know that You are of equal power with the Father, and therefore supreme Lord over diseases
- The leper had faith in the Divine power of Jesus Christ, partly out of his own inward illumination, and partly by the evidence of the miracles which Jesus Christ had already wrought
- Observe the hypothetical expression, *If You are willing*
- He has no doubt as to Jesus Christ's power, but the words *If You are willing* show that his desire for healing was controlled by submission to the will of God



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- For bodily diseases are often necessary for the health of the soul
- And this God knows, though man does not know
- Therefore, in asking for earthly blessings, we must submit ourselves to the will and wisdom of God
- Observe in verse 41 that Jesus stretched forth His hand and touched the leper
- Thus He showed that He was superior to the Law, which forbade contact with a leper
- He touched him that He might heal him, and that His Divine power of healing might be made manifest



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- There is no interval between the command and the work of Christ
- He spoke, and it was done
- His will is His omnipotence
- By this act Jesus Christ showed that He came into the world as a great Physician, that He might cure all diseases, and cleanse us from all our defilements
- The word *immediately* shows that Jesus Christ healed the leper, not by any natural means, but by a Divine power which works instantly



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- *See that you say nothing to anyone*, St. Chrysostom says that our Lord gave him this charge, "to avoid showiness, and to teach us not to boast of our virtues, but to hide them."
- It is evident that He wished to draw the thoughts of men away from His miracles, and to fix them upon His doctrine
- *show yourself to the priest*, Jesus Christ thus showed His respect for the ordinances of the Jewish Law
- The man had to show himself to a priest who had the power under the Law to confirm that he was healed



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- Then, under the priest's direction, the man could perform the ritual of purification, offer the necessary sacrifices, be restored to the community, and returned to fellowship with God
- Our Lord sent him to the priest, that he might be seen to recognize their special office in cases of leprosy; and further, that the priest himself might have clear evidence that this leper was cleansed, not after the custom of the Law, but by the operation of grace



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- Jesus cautions the person He has healed not to reveal the miracle
- Jesus' true identity must not be revealed too soon; He must fulfill the words of the prophets before the opposition to His ministry
- The healed leper is, however, unable to keep quiet in his joy over his healing and restoration to his family and community
- The result was that Jesus could not enter openly into a city, a populous place, but was obliged to remain in retired places



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper 1:40-45

- After healing the leper, what is ironic about the condition of Jesus contrasted with the condition of the leper?
- The former leper is restored to the community, but as for Jesus, it becomes impossible for Him to enter the town because of the crowds of people who want to see Him
- Ironically Jesus and the man have traded places
- Jesus has healed the man at a personal cost
- Jesus has taken on the leper's previous status, *Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places*



# Discussion

- What does the Greek word metanoia mean? What does the New Testament use it to mean? If metanoia is a gradual process, how is it manifested?
- Though Mark provides few details of the temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness, what is the importance of some of the details he does provide, such as the presence of wild beasts, the leading into the desert by the Spirit, and the length of time spent there?
- What is the reasoning behind Jesus' strategy of warning demons and men to keep silent about his identity?



# Discussion

- Both John the Baptist and Jesus follow practices of self-discipline for religious reasons. What self-disciplinary practices do you use for religious (not health or other personal) reasons? How have they influenced your own “change of heart” (repentance)?
- John the Baptist admits that he is not worthy to do even menial tasks for the Messiah. How does humility (the knowledge that you are not worthy of God) differ from feelings that you have no self-worth (self-loathing)? How does true humility enhance your self-worth in God’s sight?



# Discussion

- Zebedee's sons immediately left their father and his business to follow Jesus. How radical is your own response to His call? How rapid is it?
- Jesus gets up well before daylight to pray in a remote spot. What do you imagine that the Son of God prayed about, and how might he have prayed? How frequently do you pray, and when, and where? What do you do when you pray?