

Mark's Gospel doesn't have all the Christmassy bits.

He jumps straight in.

Here is a story - the story of Jesus.

And he is - **BIG ANNOUNCEMENT** - verse 1

He is - the Christ - the promised Servant  
and he is - the Son of God - God himself!

He is the one that God has been telling of  
for hundreds of years.

Isaiah, and Malachi said so - he is on the way  
and God will send a messenger to prepare the way.

John the Baptist said so -  
I am that messenger - he is here, ready and waiting.

So our Christmas event - not far away now  
is not just a nice story about some nice people  
who have a nice baby - and it all turns out all right.

It is about the arrival of someone  
who is the fulfilment of God's promise for centuries.

Who will change the world, and make everything right.

And it will not be easy.

There is an easy way - just punishment for sin  
God could get rid of sinful people  
but there would be no-one left.

Waiting - with Patience  
The beginning of Good News

2<sup>nd</sup> of  
Advent

Isaiah 40. 1 - 11  
Mark 1. 1 - 8

Instead - God is planning grace and forgiveness.  
he sends - not a Judge but a Saviour -  
and the process by which sinful people can be forgiven  
and receive not death but life  
will involve the life and death  
of God himself in human form.

So John comes preaching sin and repentance  
grace and forgiveness - for those who repent.  
He ministers Baptism to the repentant  
and refuses it to those who are not.

Even here, before Jesus begins  
we see discernment, judgement, and separation.

But also the promise of Jesus  
who will minister another baptism - with the Holy Spirit  
so that sinners may change and be pleasing to God.

There is a lot of stuff in these 8 verses.  
And it will take more than 20 minutes to take it in.

And then there is Isaiah's message  
which again takes more than a few minutes to take it in.

Isaiah announces to a captive people  
that their freedom is about to happen.

Is it about a captive people in exile  
about to return home?

Or about a whole human race, captive to sin,  
who are to be offered a way back to heaven?

IT IS BOTH.

And for us - it is the second.

Isaiah sees God preparing a way for us to travel.

He has a picture in his mind  
like a road-building crew making a motorway.

In the wilderness - there is going to be a road.

God will make level the uneven bits  
even taking down the mountains  
and filling up the valleys.

Like giant earth-moving machines.

But more important than the road  
is the opening up of the view.

The glory of the Lord will be revealed.

Even before we travel to heaven  
we will be given a sight of it - a glimpse of glory.

This life - and the mess we have made of it  
is as transient as grass and flowers  
that wither and fade.

That life - based on God's promised word  
will stand forever.

And the picture moves on - like a video clip

The heralds announce his victorious arrival

The Sovereign LORD travels down the road to us

He comes in power and victory  
sweeping all before him

and then - the picture changes again

and this Mighty Sovereign Lord,  
clothed in Power and Majesty,  
at whose breath the mountains tremble and fall

he is suddenly seen as a gentle shepherd  
carrying lambs in his arms.

We won't go on - because time does not permit.

But this God of Isaiah  
who is the Jesus of Christmas  
is mighty, and gentle. Awesome, and loving.

If he truly is the God of all the earth  
as Isaiah claims  
we are very fortunate.

And we would be wise to welcome him  
and accept him, as our God.  
because one day there will be nothing else  
but his glory, his breath, his word, and his people.  
That is our God. Do you know him?

He is the meaning of life  
the answer to all our big questions.

He gives meaning and purpose to the universe  
and make life worth living.

So if you want to know more -  
keep coming to church  
to explore about Jesus,  
and how we fit in to his great plans.

Talk to me or Frances  
if there are particular things you want to ask or explore

But if there is any truth  
in what people have discovered about God  
for centuries, for millennia

we can't ignore him.

He will not go away.

We need to pursue him until we are truly his.

That's why he sent Jesus.

That's why we have Christmas.

That's what life, the world, is really all about.

And this is where you will find it.

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## Setting the Scene

Who is getting ready for Christmas?

If you had to make a list of

Things to do before Christmas

what would be on your list?

Order the turkey

put up the tree and decorations

buy presents

send cards

get special treats

How many of the things on your list  
are about Jesus?

Pray every day that people will find Jesus

Pray every day that the world will find peace

Pray every day that your friends will turn to God

plan to be in church over Christmas

invite friends to church Christmas events

write a Christmas message to send with your cards

think of Christmas presents that might point to Jesus

ask God to help you be ready for Jesus

pray, think, meditate on what Christmas really means

find ways to make this Christmas for you  
to centre on Jesus.

I wonder what was on God's "get ready for Christmas" list.

Find a mother for baby Jesus  
Find a husband who will look after them both  
Book the angel choir for 24<sup>th</sup> December

Warn people that Jesus is coming.

Who did God send to prepare people  
that Jesus was on his way?

John the Baptist.

But he also prepared people 700 years before

And who did he send to tell people  
that John the Baptist was coming?

Isaiah and Malachi, the prophets.

because God didn't want anyone to miss out  
when Jesus came to earth.

Now, does everyone today know  
that Jesus came to earth?

Most people have.

Have they all heard his message and responded?

Most people have not.

Whose job is it to remind people why Jesus came?

Mine and yours.

You and I have the "John the Baptist" job.

You and I have the "Isaiah" job.

Tell people who Jesus is - God's only Son

Tell people why he came - to be our Saviour

Tell people how to welcome him -  
stop doing bad stuff  
and ask God to help you do his stuff.

During ADVENT - the four Sundays before Christmas

we remember and get ready.

Last week - one candle - The Advent **HOPE**.  
God has promised that Jesus will come again.

Next week - John the Baptist  
and the **JOY** of being ready for Jesus.

This week - Isaiah and the Prophets  
and their message that one day  
God will bring in an age of **PEACE**  
and he is sending a special servant (Jesus)  
to be the Prince of Peace.

LIGHT TWO CANDLES.

**More later.**

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