

Advent Week 2 Reflection

Pr. Nicole Hanson-Lynn December 5-6

Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalms 85:1-2, 8-13

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Mark 1:1-8

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the giver and sustainer of our faith, the Holy Spirit.

Merry Christmas!

Too early?

In today's gospel reading, we have the entirety of the "Christmas" story in Mark. Did you catch it? "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." One verse. That's the whole thing! It certainly doesn't sound like the Christmas stories we are more familiar with. There are no angels, no wise men, no shepherds, not even a birth! Because of its length, I have a hard time calling it a "narrative" at all. Just an announcement: the beginning of the good news. And like a racecar, Mark is off.

I feel like I'm in a race this year, too. Many of my Christmas traditions won't be happening this year. The trappings that I am used to, that I take comfort in. In many ways, it will be a pared down Christmas. So what can we learn from the simplest Christmas "narrative," a narrative that we often skip over because it's so short?

Mark is a master of saying profound things quickly. Take another look at that one-verse Christmas narrative. There's so much to unpack there! This is the beginning. This gospel ends on an uncertain note. There is so much to do. Christ's identity, which had been secret for most of the gospel, is revealed! The curtain is pulled back and the disciples are told to go and tell the good news, but they are afraid. And the curtain closes. The gospel tells only the beginning of the story. The rest is for us to see and live in our lives with God in the world.

Second, note that this is also good news. That's what "gospel" means: good news. In the Roman Empire, there were many political gospels. A royal birth might have a "gospel" announcement, with someone sent to proclaim the birth, and possibly festivities or some public celebration. This proclamation was called a "gospel." So Mark is preparing us to hear a gospel, but people accustomed to empire gospels are going to be surprised by the contents of this gospel.

Third, this is Jesus Christ. As one of my professors liked to joke, “Christ is not Jesus’ last name.” And it isn’t; it’s his title. Christ, the Greek translation of “messiah,” is the “anointed one.” It is a kingly title, a prophetic title. It is the title of the savior.

And finally, this is the Son of God. Even though Jesus is going to tell everyone to keep his identity secret for most of the gospel, for the readers, the cat is out of the bag at verse one. We know this is the messiah, and what’s more, that the messiah is the Son of God. We read this gospel with eyes opened to the truth that the disciples need much longer to see.

And at the end of the day, that is the center of all the Christmas narratives. This is the beginning of the good news Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. As we pare down our Christmas traditions to the essential things, this is the essential center we return to. This is the root of everything. This *is* the good news. While there is room for lament and joy in a strange Christmas, there is not room to forget the good news behind our traditions.

I confess that I often skip this Christmas story. The others are so much more exciting, so much more compelling. And when I do read this one, I’m more drawn to the next verses, moving to John the Baptist. But this year, it seems necessary to remember this simplest of all Christmas stories. To remember that one of our four gospel writers thought this simplicity was all we needed. So Merry Christmas early.

This is the beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

Announcements

Thank you to everyone continuing their financial support. Your stewardship and discipleship are faithful witnesses in this time.

We will be making a Salem and Zion Advent devotional, with a reflection each day from members of the congregation. If you are interested in more information about how you can participate in writing a reflection or if you are interested in receiving the completed devotional, call our offices or contact Pr. Nicole with any questions!

Enclosed, you will find the worship bulletin, readings, and reflections for our (Pre)Advent Midweek Worship services. Our theme is “Wandering in the Wilderness: Learning to Trust God.”

Peace be with you.