

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

The Preaching of John the Baptist

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.^a

2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,^b

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who shall prepare your way;

³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight—”

⁴John the Baptist appeared ^c in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem;

and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The Baptism of Jesus

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit


1:2–8: Mt 3:1–12; Lk 3:2–16; Jn 1:6, 15, 19–28.


1:4: Acts 13:24.

1:9–11: Mt 3:13–17; Lk 3:21–22; Jn 1:29–34.


1:3: Is 40:3.


1:1 The beginning: The opening verse is a title for the entire Gospel, the **gospel**: The “good news” that Christ has come to *rescue* all nations from sin, selfishness, and Satan and to *reveal* the inner life of God to the world. This is accomplished as Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God (1:15). **the Son of God:** The predominant title for Jesus in Mark (1:1; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:6; 14:61; 15:39; CCC 422, 515). Both the works (miracles) and words (teaching) of Jesus substantiate this claim to divine Sonship, while the Father announces it publicly at his Baptism (1:11) and Transfiguration (9:7).

 **1:2–3** Mark outlines the mission of John and Jesus by splicing together three OT passages: Is 40:3, Ex 23:20, and Mal 3:1. • The Exodus passage recalls how Yahweh appointed a messenger (angel) to lead Israel from the slavery of Egypt to the safety of the Promised Land. Isaiah projects this memory from the distant past into the future, announcing that both Israel and the nations will experience a New Exodus in the messianic age. Preparations are in order for a new Deliverer, the Suffering Servant, who will bring the nations from the darkness of sin and idolatry to the light of Mt. Zion. Malachi's oracle presents the dark side of this scenario, warning Jerusalem that the coming of the messianic Lord will mean disaster if the shepherds of Israel are unprepared to welcome his arrival. For Mark, these passages are linked together by a common call to prepare the “way” of the Lord: John is the herald who points out the “way” of this New Exodus, while Jesus is the “Lord” and Suffering Servant who accomplishes it. This is the only time Mark quotes directly from the OT as the Gospel narrator. See note on Mk 8:27–10:52.


 **1:5 baptized by him:** The baptism of John signified the need for inner purity but did not effect this in a sacramental way. John was fully aware that his disciples must also receive the greater Baptism of the Messiah, which both signifies and effects spiritual cleansing. Only the Christian sacrament washes the soul of sin, infuses the grace of divine sonship, and regenerates the believer in the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5; Acts 2:38;

Tit 3:5; CCC 718–20). in the **river Jordan:** The main river in Palestine and a suitable location to baptize large numbers. • The Jordan is linked with stories of deliverance in the OT. Here the Israelites crossed over to inherit the Promised Land (Josh 3:14–17). Here too Naaman the Syrian (a Gentile) was cleansed of leprosy (2 Kings 5:14). Against this twofold background John's ministry at the Jordan prepares for the salvation of Israel and the Gentiles by the Messiah.

 **1:6 John was clothed:** Garments of animal skin were the distinctive attire of OT prophets (Zech 13:4). • John's appearance recalls that of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), and his presence at the Jordan recalls the site where Elijah departed into heaven (2 Kings 2:6–11). See note on Mk 9:11. **ate locusts:** One of a few clean (kosher) insects that God permitted the Israelites to eat under the Old Covenant (Lev 11:22). This detail portrays John as faithful to the Torah and highlights his renunciation of worldly comforts. His disciplined life-style also included fasting (2:18).

 **1:7 I am not worthy:** Evidence of John's humility. Removing and carrying **sandals** was a menial task reserved for slaves serving their master. John regards himself as unworthy to perform even a slave's task for the Messiah. • **Allegorically** (St. Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Evan. 7*): Jesus' sandals, made from the skins of dead animals, represent mankind dead in sin. Once Christ clothed himself with our nature in the Incarnation, the miracle proved so profound that not even John was able to unfasten or explain this mystery of God-made-man.

1:9–11 The Baptism of Jesus. As One who is sinless, Jesus has no actual need for repentance (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22). He nevertheless receives John's baptism to identify with sinners as part of the Father's plan to save them (CCC 536). The **voice** of the Father, the Baptism of the **Son**, and the descent of the **Spirit** mark this episode as a revelation of the Blessed Trinity. See note on Mt 3:15.

 **1:10 the heavens opened:** The underlying expression is more dramatic than the translation, since the Greek verb *schizo* means to “rip” or “tear”. Heaven was thus “torn open” at the sound of God's voice and the descent of the Spirit (Is 64:1). Elsewhere in Mark this same verb depicts the tearing of the Temple veil (15:38), an episode similarly accompanied by a

^a Other ancient authorities omit the *Son of God*.

^b Other ancient authorities read *in the prophets*.

^c Other ancient authorities read *John was baptizing*.