

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®
Sunday, December 10, 2017
The Second Sunday of Advent

A QUICK START

Some movies open slowly. They introduce us to the characters and their relationships with one another. They give us a feel for the period in which the story is set. They give us background information that helps us to understand the situation, and then the story begins to unfold.

But other films begin with no introduction. We are immediately thrust into the story. We see things happening, characters coming and going, interactions taking place – all with no prior explanation.

Mark's Gospel is like one of those films. It immediately starts with an exciting scene, one involving John the Baptist. The other Gospel writers take another approach.

Matthew sets the stage for the appearance of John the Baptist by presenting the genealogy of Jesus, giving an account of his birth and his escape into Egypt, and then relating how Jesus made his home in Nazareth and from there went forth to encounter John.

Luke prepares us for the appearance of John by telling us how God granted Zechariah and Elizabeth a child in their old age. He reports the events that surround the birth of their son John, and then after relating the story of the birth of Jesus and his growing up, he brings John and Jesus together at the Jordan River.

John, in his Gospel, goes even further back to prepare for the ministry of John the Baptist. He goes back before creation, showing how the appearance of the Baptist was in accord with God's plan for salvation.

Mark, however, handles things differently. In the first line of his Gospel, Mark simply tells us this is "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God." Then the action found in this Sunday's reading begins. (Mark 1:1-8)

Without warning, John suddenly comes out of the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance. This strange figure, oddly clothed and oddly nourished, announces that the long-expected Messiah is about to appear.

In response, Mark tells us that people from the Judean countryside and from Jerusalem rushed out to hear John's message. They acknowledged their sins and were baptized so they might be ready for the mighty one about to come. There was excitement in the air. At last, the prophecies of old were about to be fulfilled.

But as we listen to the events of this Sunday's Gospel, our reaction is most likely very different. We have heard this Advent gospel before. Like an action film that we have seen many times, it no longer excites us as it once did.

But it should. The message it contains is meant for us. That message is so important that Mark wastes no time for introductions, he immediately puts John the Baptist before us. Mark wants to draw us in. He wants us to hear the message of John, "One mightier than I is coming after me."

Jesus, the mighty One, is coming this day, not just at the end of time. He comes today as surely as he first came at Bethlehem. He comes as the Gospel is proclaimed, as consecrated Bread and Wine are blessed and shared, and as the Church gathers in prayer.

He comes in experiences of tenderness, love, and mercy, and he comes when we allow our minds and hearts the quiet they need to be aware of his presence.

Mark wanted the readers of his Gospel to hear the preaching of John the Baptist without delay. There was no time to set the stage; John's message had to be delivered at once! Get ready, the Messiah is coming.

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