

A Longer Look at the Lessons

November 29, 2020 to  
January 3, 2020

Series B, Advent & Christmas  
Seasons

## **The Holy Gospel: Mark 13:24–37**

November 29, 2020

First Sunday in Advent

In the verse preceding this pericope, ending a section that points to days of great tribulation even for the elect in “end times,” Jesus said, “Be on your guard; I have told you all things beforehand.” Forewarned is forearmed! The best way for us to be on guard is to remember in faith that the climactic end of this age will proclaim the cosmic victory of our Lord Jesus Christ, a victory we, by God’s grace, will share. That event will be unmistakable. “Son of Man” is the title Jesus chose by which to refer to Himself in a formal way. It was messianic in thrust, but not as popularly used and not as politically weighted as was “Messiah” (see Daniel 7:13–14).

1. How should we feel about the coming of this glorious Son of Man? What assurance is there for us in His “[sending] out the angels and [gathering] His elect from the four winds, and from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven”?

The signs of the end, except for the climactic events that will attend the very ending of this creation, are not one-time occurrences, but have repeated themselves in history—in false “Christs,” persecution, wars, natural calamities, and so on. Every generation of Christians has in that way been reminded that this is a temporary world and that its end is at the door. Since the great promises of God have all been fulfilled in Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension, nothing else has to happen in human history before the Son of Man returns in glory.

2. We don’t have sprouting fig trees around us. What might Jesus point to in our situation to provide us with a similar lesson?

Jesus’ saying “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” may refer to the people to whom Jesus was speaking, for some of them lived to see His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem come true. But it may better be understood as referring to “this race of people” or “this breed of people.” At any rate, the signs He pointed to have been seen by believers and unbelievers throughout history. The unbeliever shrugs them off, but they remind believers to be on their guard because the end is approaching.

3. If nothing else has to happen before the glorious return of the Son of Man, why have 2,000 years gone by without His returning? (See 2 Peter 3:8–10.)
4. What assurance is there for us in Jesus’ “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away”?

5. Since He, the Son of God, is the eternal Word who was with God and was God from the beginning, how could Jesus say that the Son does not know the day appointed in the Father's will for the end of the present creation? What should be our reaction to our not knowing when that time will be?

In Jesus' little parable about a man going away and leaving his household in the care of his servants, it is obvious that Jesus is the householder and we are His servants.

6. What does it say to us that He leaves "each with his work"? How can you determine what is the task that Jesus has assigned to you?

"In the evening," "at midnight," "when the cock crows," and "in the morning" relate to the four watches of the night: 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m., 9:00 p.m.-12:00 midnight, 12:00 midnight-3:00 a.m., 3:00 a.m.-6:00 a.m.

7. What does Jesus say to us with the master of the house finding someone "asleep"?

## The Holy Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

December 6, 2020

Second Sunday in Advent

Typically, Mark jumped right into his task, giving both the title and the purpose of his Gospel in seven Greek words, translated “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” His only prelude to telling about Jesus’ life and work is these few words about the Way-Preparer. It was important that his readers, largely Gentile Christians, understand that the Christ had His roots in Old Testament prophecy and that His Way-Preparer did too. Mark’s quotation from “Isaiah the prophet” is actually a combination of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Isaiah was an entity in itself while Malachi was combined with others as “The Book of the Twelve,” so Mark credited the major prophet. The quotation gives John’s person, his message, and the desert setting their basis in Old Testament prophecy.

*John* means “Yahweh is gracious”—a most appropriate name for the Way-Preparer of the One whose name, *Yeshua* (Jesus), means “Yahweh saves.” Luke says of John: “The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel” (1:80).

As an adult, John offered “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” The Greek *metanoia*, “repentance,” literally means “a change of mind and heart.” *Metanoia* implies far more than a guilty feeling upon getting caught; it includes a genuine change in the will to go in a completely new direction. *Aphesis*, “forgiveness,” implied “a sending away.” Only God can do it, but when He sends sins away, a person is fully free of them and of their consequences (see Psalm 103:12).

19. What outward act expressed the inner truth and qualified people for Baptism?  
How is that a part of our lives as Christians?

20. What was the point of John’s having them come out to meet him in the desert?

Mark’s description of John and of his ministry of preaching and baptizing leads to his stating John’s reason for being as the Way-Preparer. His mission was to point people to The Mightier One who would come after him.

21. How did John emphasize the superiority of the One whose way he was preparing? How did he contrast their ministries?

22. When did the promised baptism with the Holy Spirit take place? (See Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 11:1-18; Titus 3:4-7.)

23. What is the difference between John's Baptism and the Baptism that Jesus later commanded? (See Matthew 28:18-20.)

## **The Holy Gospel: John 1:6–8; 19–28**

December 13, 2020

Third Sunday of Advent

John began his Gospel with words reminiscent of Genesis 1. He wrote of the Word who was with God and who was God and who made all things as having life in Himself, and that life being the light of men. He continued this metaphor as he told of John the Baptist, saying that John was not the light, but came only as a witness to the light.

35. In God's saving plan for His world, what occasioned the coming of John the Baptist at just that time?

John the evangelist's description of John the Way-Preparer agreed with the Way-Preparer's testimony about himself. John the Baptist had considerable impact on Jewish society. Josephus estimated that 300,000 people came out into the desert to be baptized by him. The whole Jewish society was buzzing with conversation about John—wondering whether this prophetic figure, with his uncompromising call for a repentance validated by a change in attitudes and actions, was the promised Christ. Opinions on both sides of the question must have flowed freely, even among the members of the Sanhedrin. Finally, that body, referred to as "the Jews" in John's Gospel, was constrained to send official representatives, priests, and Levite guards to observe and to investigate and to interrogate John. John was true to his calling. In response to their pointed question, he stated clearly: "I am not the Christ."

Since Elijah had gone bodily into heaven in a fiery chariot, there was expectation that he would return prior to the coming of the Messiah (see Malachi 4:5–6). "The prophet" also had messianic overtones (see Deuteronomy 18:18).

36. Jesus later identified John as "Elijah" (see Matthew 17:10–13). Why, then, did John tell his interrogators "I am not [Elijah]"?

37. John's questioners asked, "Who are you?" How did John identify himself? What does his answer reveal about John?

As Mark's Gospel tells us, John called people to "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (1:4). Though Old Testament ceremonial law had a number of cleansings with water, John's general call to the Jewish people to a Baptism of repentance for forgiveness was something new. It is understandable that his interrogators would press him about his authority to call for this new kind of Baptism if he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. The Jewish people were familiar with baptism, especially as a ritual

act of cleansing for Jewish proselytes. But they were unfamiliar with a need for Jews to be baptized.

In recording John's answer, the evangelist quoted only his "I baptize with water" (1:26). The other Gospels let us know that he completed the contrast by saying of the One whose way he was preparing, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Look a little beyond this pericope into its context and you see that the evangelist was keying in on the specific identification of Jesus by John. Read verses 29–34, remembering that John the evangelist had been a disciple of John the Baptist before becoming a disciple of Jesus. He had heard the Baptist's testimony himself. John the Baptist identified Jesus not only as the one "who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" but also as the Lamb of God and the Son of God.

## **The Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26–38**

December 20, 2020

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Luke probably interviewed Mary, the mother of Jesus, and provided details that she shared with him, such as this account of the angel announcing that she would be the mother of the Messiah (see Luke 1:1–4). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke accurately recorded that event for us here.

With “In the sixth month,” Luke connects the experience of Mary that he is about to recount with what had proceeded. It was the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, who would be the mother of John the Baptist. The same angel, Gabriel, who had told Zechariah about that special child, was now sent to Nazareth to a virgin named Mary. Mary was betrothed to Joseph. In Jewish society of that day, the betrothal (the agreement between two families) was the legally binding act. Joseph and Mary were husband and wife legally, but their living together in consummation of the marriage awaited a scheduled time of wedding festivities. For Mary, the angel had an even more wondrous message than the one he had brought to Zechariah. She, a virgin, would conceive and carry and give birth to a son whom she was to name Jesus and who would be called Son of the Most High.

Matthew, as he recorded the birth of Jesus, saw it as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy (see 1:22–23).

53. Why was Mary chosen to be this favored one?

Luke established immediately that Joseph, who would be the child’s legal father, was a descendant of David—but what Luke told about the angel’s message and Mary’s reaction to it also clearly established that Joseph was not \_\_\_\_. At the end of chapter 3, Luke listed a genealogy that many feel is Mary’s through her father (tradition names him “Heli”), which declares that she, too, was of David’s line. Both legally and physically, Jesus was the Son of David.

54. Why was it important for the Gospel writers to establish this fact?

Mary “was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.” Imagine the agitation and wonder we would feel if the Lord’s messenger were suddenly to say to us, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

55. What is the significance of God’s assigning the name *Jesus* to this special child?

56. What was the angel explaining to Mary by saying, “The Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end”? How did the angel explain the process that would be involved in this virgin’s conceiving and giving birth to a son?

57. To what validating evidence did the angel point Mary?

58. How did Mary show that God had not made a mistake in choosing her to be the mother of the Savior? What does her example encourage in us as we prepare for Christmas?

## **The Holy Gospel: Luke 2:22–40**

December 27, 2020

The First Sunday After Christmas

Joseph and Mary walked the six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem for a purpose. The Law of Moses declared a woman to be ceremonially unclean following childbirth. The birth of a son called for seven days of seclusion as “contagiously” unclean, followed by another 33 days of religious impurity, during all of which she was not to come into contact with hallowed things, nor enter the sanctuary. In the case of the birth of a daughter, the numbers were doubled (see Leviticus 12). Joseph and Mary had come to the temple to offer the prescribed sacrifice for her purification: “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

They also had brought Jesus, now 40 days old, “to present Him to the Lord.” This ritual requirement, the redemption of the firstborn son, memorialized God’s sparing the firstborn of the Israelite families in Egypt the night the angel of the Lord slew the firstborn of all the Egyptians (see Exodus 13:11–16). The concept was that from that time on, every firstborn belonged to the Lord. The firstborn animals were to be sacrificed to Him; the firstborn sons were to serve Him throughout their lives. In actual practice, the Levites served in the place of the firstborn (see Numbers 3:5–13). The firstborn sons were “redeemed” (bought back from the Lord) to live with their parents by the offering of the appointed sacrifice. This ritual presentation of Jesus to the Lord and His redemption through the offering of a sacrifice were carried out by Joseph and Mary after she had gone through her rite of purification.

103. What is especially striking about *these* two parents acknowledging that their firstborn son belonged to God?

Simeon is introduced simply as “a man in Jerusalem.” He was not particularly prominent in Jerusalem’s religious circles, but had great spiritual qualifications: he “was righteous and devout, waiting for consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”

104. What does it mean that Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel”?  
What promise had the Holy Spirit made to Simeon? How did Simeon recognize the baby Jesus as the Lord’s Christ?

Simeon’s song of praise is called the *Nunc Dimittis* from its first words in Latin. In the fifth century, it became part of the Church’s worship life, fittingly used as a liturgical song that celebrates our having seen the Lord’s Christ in Holy Communion.

105. What did Simeon say that made Joseph and Mary marvel?

106. To Mary, Simeon spoke of the destiny that awaited her son, a destiny that would have a direct effect on her. What does it mean that Jesus was “appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel”? (See 1 Peter 2:6–8.) How would Jesus be “a sign that is opposed . . . , so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed”? (See John 10:22–33.) When did a sword pierce through Mary’s soul?

Anna is introduced, not just as a woman but as “a prophetess.” Since she was a fixture in the temple, Anna’s testimony about Jesus must have carried some weight with those who heard her.

107. What do you think Anna said as she “began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem”?

Luke does not mention the flight to Egypt and the family’s living there for a time. Having provided significant information about Jesus’ birth and infancy, Luke wrote in a summary way about His childhood development in His family in Nazareth.

108. Could we say about our own children in our Christian homes, “[They] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon [them]”?

## The Holy Gospel: Luke 2:40–52

January 3, 2020

Second Sunday after Christmas

Out of all the incidents that Mary must have told Luke when he interviewed her, the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write this story as representative of the childhood of Jesus. Jesus was 12 years old— about to take His place in the Jewish community as a *Bar Mitzvah*, a “son of duty,” and take on the responsibilities of an adult male Jew. Joseph and Mary were faithful in their religious duties, and participated in all the required rites and ceremonies, including the Passover festival in Jerusalem.

When the seven-day festival was completed, Mary and Joseph joined the company of pilgrims for the return to Galilee. Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

121. How could these parents travel a whole day without concern that Jesus was not at their side?

Retracing their steps, they looked for Jesus along the way and at the place where they had camped in the hills outside Jerusalem. Finally they found Him in the temple, sitting among the rabbis, caught up in their teaching and discussion. Luke does not explain where Jesus spent the nights while alone in Jerusalem. Perhaps one of the rabbis befriended Him and brought Him back with him to the temple during the days.

122. What impression did Jesus make on the teachers and the people who gathered around them?

We might expect parents in that circumstance to be firm in disciplining such a thoughtless son, and Mary did express her concern and disappointment. But the Greek softens her complaint by having her call Jesus *teknon*, “child,” instead of *huios*, “son.”

123. What evidently was awakened in Mary and Joseph by the circumstances they found that softened her rebuke?

Responding to His mother’s complaint, Jesus only expressed surprise that they had not known where He would be. The Greek is *en tois tou patros mou*, “in the things of My Father.” It specifies neither the “My Father’s business” of the KJV nor the “in My Father’s house” of the ESV, but “house” is an appropriate translation, for the temple surely was the place where the Father’s “things” were to be found. Remarkable here to note is that Jesus uses the singular “my” instead of the plural “our” when referring to His Father. This

denotes the unique relationship between Jesus and God, between God the Son and God the Father.

124. Why did His parents not understand what He was saying to them? How did His mother react to incidents such as this?

Returning to Nazareth, Jesus “was submissive to them.” With His *Bar Mitzvah*, Jesus’ formal instruction at the synagogue school ended. Joseph’s training Him in the skills of carpentry accelerated. Jesus grew into the adult community of Nazareth.

125. What adverbs might we use today to label the four aspects of His growth that Luke described?