

Second Sunday of Advent, Gospel, Year B

LIFE UNDER GOD'S SON

Mark 1:1-8

Second Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

1The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way;

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight,'"

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

DIAGNOSIS: A So-Called Son of God

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Crooked Paths

We, like the people of Jerusalem and residents of the Judean countryside are well aware that our paths (i.e., way of life) are not straight (i.e., faithful to God). Like the people of Malachi's day we have not honored God; we have despised God's name; our sacrifices are unworthy of God. We also have wearied

God by saying, "All who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord and he delights in them" (Mal. 2: 17).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Honoring Caesar
Our unfaithfulness reveals an idolatry which is expected, even demanded, of us in a world ruled by Caesar. Caesar is proclaimed as son of God. Caesar is the bringer of "the good news." Caesar is the one to whom we are expected to bow and proclaim ourselves unworthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. Because Caesar is our savior we despise God's name, sacrifice unworthily to God, and perpetuate the untruths of the empire.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Not So Good News
The True Son of God, the bearer of the Good News is coming. A messenger has been sent to proclaim his arrival. The messenger is clothed as the one promised by the prophet Malachi, and he is announcing the arrival of One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. The gig is up. Fraudulent sons of God have had their day, but their days are soon ended. All who have bowed the knee to Caesar are lost. The day of reckoning has come. We appeal to Caesar to save us. He cannot.

PROGNOSIS: Jesus Christ, True Son of God

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Truly Good News
A messenger has come who is preparing a way for the Powerful One whose arrival is imminent. As Isaiah proclaimed, "Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (Isa. 40:4-5). We who have been living in exile are told, "Your penalty is paid. Christ has redeemed you and claimed you as his own. You who have wandered in the wilderness have been found. You who have need of cleansing are washed with the Holy Spirit. Your sins no longer bind you. You are free to be people of God!"

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Caesar Exposed

Freed from the power of sin and freed from the false rulers who have held us captive, we now live under the power of the Spirit into whom we were baptized. Instead of living in fear, we live by faith. Instead of perpetuating untruths, we live in the truth of the Gospel. Through repentance we have taken a new path, a straight one, and left behind the crooked paths that led to death.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Straight Paths

Repentance has done its work. Our paths have been made straight by the power of the Spirit. We are free to offer acceptable sacrifices to our God, to honor God in our words and deeds, to live by the truth of the Gospel. The glory of the Lord has been revealed!