

# The Second Sunday Of Advent

## December 6, 2020

Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson  
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### Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; <sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’” <sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And 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. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He 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. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The word of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

### SERMON

The beginning of the good news. This sentence that begins the gospel of Mark draws us to attention. It lets us know that we are about to embark on a journey where we will discover just what this “good news” is all about. When we read or hear “The beginning of the good news,” we are filled with anticipation and excitement to learn what comes next.

When you think about it, all new beginnings can be filled with all kinds of excitement and anticipation. A new beginning brings with it endless possibilities for us to explore and experience. Whether it is a new day, a new job, a new location, a new outlook, beginnings are filled with hope, perhaps some doubts as well, but ultimately a sense that this new beginning has the potential to be life-giving.

We all have stories of new beginnings. Some of the stories of our beginnings are positive because they had a meaningful impact on our lives. Some of the stories of our beginnings are negative because they became disastrous for us. I’m sure that other beginnings were uneventful for us or were awkward and funny.



I will tell you right now that the new beginning of becoming the pastor of Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church was definitely not what I expected. This new call has certainly been quite the adventure so far. It has challenged me, but it has also taught me how to adapt to unique situations. This new beginning has helped me to discover new ways of doing ministry.

The season of Advent is unique in the fact that we are preparing for a beginning that has already taken place. We already know the good news of Jesus Christ. We have celebrated many Christmases and Easters up to this point in our lives. We have already learned that we are saved by grace through our faith in Jesus Christ. Yet once again from Mark we hear the words: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." If we already know the good news, why do we need to begin again?

Every year on New Year's Eve I have at least one conversation with someone or a group of people about our hopes and dreams for the new year. No matter how much or how little the past year lived up to our expectations, the conversation about new hopes and new dreams in the coming year takes place. Everyone is hopeful of the new beginning of the new year. It is viewed as a clean slate that is filled once again with endless possibilities for each person.

Every Advent we celebrate the beginning of a new liturgical year in the church. It too is filled with endless possibilities for our mission and ministry. We are free once again to hope for new ways that Christ Jesus will show up in our midst. We are free to hope that we will learn something new about God. We are free to hope that the good news will help more people discover their love for Jesus and Jesus' love for them.

On this second Sunday of Advent, Mark's gospel reminds us that we, like John the Baptizer, are the beginning of the good news. We are tasked with the opportunity to prepare the way of the Lord. Since we do know the story and how it ends, we are free to begin it once again through witness, through worship, and through service, so that not only is the story better engrained in our hearts, but also in the hearts of others whom we encounter in daily life.

We are the beginning in whom God chooses to use in order to further spread the Kingdom in this broken world. We have the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and therefore we have the power to help bring Immanuel into the hearts of others. We are the beginning that brings new beginnings to the lives of others.

And we are free to be the beginning of the good news, not only because we know the story, but also because Jesus, the first good news, renews us in baptism and thus gives us a new beginning every day. This is the gift of forgiveness that we receive in the cleansing waters of baptism. It forgives us and renews us each day so that we are free to once again be the beginning of the good news to all people in our daily lives.



But wait; doesn't the beginning of the good news in Mark's gospel start with the fulfillment of scripture? Doesn't the beginning of John's gospel state that: "In the beginning was the Word...?" As Martin Luther would say, "This is most certainly true." It is the reason we are free to be the beginning of the good news to others, for someone in our past took the time to introduce us to God's word in scripture. Whether it was a parent, a pastor, a Sunday school teacher, a godparent, or someone else who loved us, they shared God's word with us so that we could begin our relationship with Jesus. Now, we are called and freed to do the same for someone else be they friend or stranger, child or adult. Thus, the cycle of beginnings continues.

We must never cease to be the beginning of the good news in our broken world, for in doing so we are preparing the way for Jesus to once again be born into the midst of our broken world, so that he can once again put an end to evil and sin. After all, being the beginning of the good news is conveying the promise that, not only is the kin-dome of God here and now, ever continuing to expand, but also that death is no longer an end for us. Christ Jesus went to the cross to make sure that death became a new beginning for us. Now, isn't that the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Amen.



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