

## Mark 1:1-8

Mark begins his telling of the “good news” with quotations from the Old Testament. God had promised the Israelites a “messenger” (v. 2) to lead them. The prophet Malachi understood this promise as pointing to the end-times, to one who would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. To him, the “messenger” would be Elijah. While v. 3 originally spoke of return from exile, by Jesus’ time it was seen as an expression of God’s comfort and salvation. To us, John the Baptist comes to prepare for, and announce, Jesus’ coming. Tradition says that John baptised near Jericho, in an arid region. People came to him in large numbers, repenting (changing their mind sets), “confessing their sins” (v. 5), resolving to sin no more, and dipping themselves in the River. John dressed like a hermit or prophet (v. 6). (In Palestine, some species of locusts were eaten.) John is so unworthy, compared to “the one who ... is coming” (v. 7), that he cannot untie his “sandals”, a task normally performed by a slave. His baptism is a sign of purification, of turning to God, of accepting God’s forgiveness and judgement; Jesus’ baptism re-establishes a spiritual link between God and humans.

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### ~ Notices ~

**Christmas** - Regrettably, the continuing Covid restrictions mean that Christmas will be more subdued this year, with no congregational singing and some of our traditional events such as the St Columba’s Christmas Tree festival and Kilfenora Cathedral Christingle service cancelled. However, the following services at Christmas will take place:

**Christmas Eve** - Kilnasoolagh - 8.00pm Communion

**Christmas Day** - Spanish Point - 9.30am Communion  
- St Columba’s - 11.30am Communion

**Prayers** - Prayers are said daily for the welfare of our community, our nation and the world. If you have any particular issue that you would like to be prayed for, do please email me on [frkevinobrien@me.com](mailto:frkevinobrien@me.com) or call me on 065 672 4721.

**YouTube** - our YouTube channel now has over 120 videos, comprising services, talks and sermons. Please do visit the channel by searching for **St Columba’s Church Ennis** and do *subscribe* if you can, we are aiming to reach 100 subscribers before Christmas. Also visit our **Facebook** page: **Drumcliffe Church of Ireland Ennis**

**Rector:** Email: [frkevinobrien@me.com](mailto:frkevinobrien@me.com) Tel: 065 672 4721

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### - Mission Charities -

The two charities being supported this year are:

**Womens Aid**                      **Jigsaw**  
[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)              [www.jigsaw.ie](http://www.jigsaw.ie)

See the diocesan website for the Bishop’s address:  
<http://www.limerick.anglican.org>

### - Advent Wreath Prayer -

God our Father, you spoke to the prophets of old  
of a Saviour who would bring peace.

You helped them to spread the joyful message  
of his coming kingdom.

Help us, as we prepare to celebrate his birth,  
to share with those around us  
the good news of your power and love.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
the Light who is coming into the world.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent (Year A)

### Collect

In the tender mercy of our God,  
the dayspring from on high shall  
break upon us, to give light to those who dwell in darkness  
and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the  
way of peace **Amen**

**Suggested Hymns** - For the online service you might  
like to view these hymns with lyrics on YouTube.

- 1) O come, O come Emmanuel  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKu0or0t8Uw>
- 2) Immortal, Invisible, God only wise  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spE-BE23qxA&t=55s>
- 3) On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zq0f0Qo6A24>
- 4) Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUMcjVFsbUE>

### Isaiah 40: 1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord’s hand  
double for all her sins.  
A voice cries out:  
‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.  
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’  
A voice says, ‘Cry out!’  
And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’  
All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.  
The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.  
The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand for ever.  
Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
‘Here is your God!’  
See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.  
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Lord, you were gracious to your land; ♦  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
You forgave the offence of your people ♦  
and covered all their sins.

### Psalms 85

I will listen to what the Lord God will say, ♦  
for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful,  
that they turn not again to folly.  
Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him, ♦  
that his glory may dwell in our land.  
Mercy and truth are met together, ♦  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;  
Truth shall spring up from the earth ♦  
and righteousness look down from heaven.  
The Lord will indeed give all that is good, ♦  
and our land will yield its increase.  
Righteousness shall go before him ♦  
and direct his steps in the way.

### 2 Peter 3: 8-15a

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him,

### Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
"Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight" ',

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 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. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

### Commentary

#### Isaiah 40:1-11

This is the beginning of the part of Isaiah written from exile in Babylon. In vv. 1-2, God speaks. Because "comfort" and "speak" are in the plural (in Hebrew), he speaks to a group, probably of angels, but possibly of prophets: i.e. may you comfort ... . Literally, they are to speak "tenderly" (to the heart, the seat of reasoning), to "Jerusalem"; but the city is in ruins, so (this passage being a vision) their audience is an idealized kingdom of his people. Tell them, he says, that their time of sorrow is over, that they have "served" their punishment for waywardness, that the Exile is about to end. Use of the word "double" (v. 2) assures that their purification from sin is finished, that difficult times are truly ended. So a new era is dawning, inaugurated by God's Word.

In vv. 3-5, a heavenly voice (or the prophet) announces, in language reminiscent of the pomp of royal pageantry in Babylon, "prepare the way of the Lord". (Christianity was

later known as The Way, God's manner of life.) God is coming; he is about to lead a new Exodus (note "wilderness", "desert") to a blessed land. Seeing this marvellous display of God's presence is independent of our tendency to sin, and thus is only dependent on God's grace and power. (The words translated "all people" mean, literally, all flesh.) Then "a voice" (v. 6) from heaven commands the prophet to "Cry out!", but he asks: what should I tell them? For they are like flowers and "grass": they fade and wither when God acts. (The word translated "breath" (v. 7) also means spirit, as in Genesis 1:2, where the wind of God sweeps over the primeval waters.) People are fickle, but God's "word" (v. 8) endures.

Even so (v. 9), the prophet (on behalf of Jerusalem) is told to tell the "good tidings", the good news, boldly, to tell all people "Here is your God!". Jerusalem ("Zion") and Judah are to be the centre for God's activity on earth. He comes, says v. 10, as a king ("with might", "rules") who really cares: he brings redemption, restoration ("reward", "recompense"). Finally, v. 11 likens him to a shepherd: one who gathers the weak ("the lambs"), makes people one with him, and compassionately leads. (In the ancient world, a shepherd led, rather than drove, his sheep, to protect them from lurking predators.)

### Psalm 85:1-2,8-13

Vv. 1-2 tell of God's restoration of Israel, probably in releasing them from Exile. But times are tough: vv. 4-7 are a prayer that God may again show favour – in the present difficulties: please, God, "restore us again"; give us life and "salvation". The people returned to a ravaged land. In vv. 8-13 the psalmist hears God speaking: he will impart blessings upon the faithful. They will receive "peace", shalom, godliness, well-being, including "salvation" which is "at hand". In this process, God's presence and power will be apparent. V. 10 says that four of God's attributes, his gifts to humankind, will come together. Then v. 11: human "faithfulness", adherence to God, the ultimate truth, will be reciprocated by him. He will give prosperity, materially and spiritually. Crops will improve (v. 12) and the people's godliness "will make a path" (v. 13) for his coming.

### 2 Peter 3:8-15a

Aware that he will soon die, the author leaves his fellow Christians with a testimony of what being Christian demands: how to live up to The Way, so that they may be among the godly when Christ comes again. It was tempting to deny that Christ would come again because early Christians expected the world to end within their lifetimes.

The delay, he argues in v. 8, is only in human terms, for God does not measure time as we do. God wishes all people to be found worthy at the Last Day; he does not want any to "perish" (v. 9) for ungodliness; so he is waiting patiently for all to repent of their waywardness. The End will come "like a thief" (v. 10), i.e. suddenly, unexpectedly. The images of the end-times in v. 10b are drawn from popular Jewish and Greek (Stoic) philosophy of the day. (Annihilation of all things by fire was a Stoic belief.) A "loud noise" heralds the Day; the conduct of all people will be made known then. So, he asks rhetorically in vv. 11-12, given that the End will come, what should our conduct be as we wait for the End and hasten it (through bringing people to Christ)? But, says v. 13, for us Christians annihilation is not the End, for (per Isaiah 66:22), we look forward to "new heavens and a new earth", inhabited by the godly. In v. 14, he answers: we should work at being "at peace", at being ethically and spiritually perfect, prepared for Christ's ("him") coming at the End. We should see the apparent delay in his coming as an opportunity for repentance, for attainment of salvation.