

## SESSION 2: PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD -

### COMMIT - DAY 1: The Son of God

The Son of God comes to carry out the work of God his Father. One of the key ways Saint Mark backs up the claim of Jesus' divinity in the first verse of his Gospel is by showing throughout his Gospel that the work of God in the Old Testament is now continuing and coming to fulfillment in the Son. Jesus is the Son of God, and as the Son he is doing the work of his Father in Heaven. Recall some of the key moments of the Old Testament: Creation, the Exodus, the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, the wandering in the desert, the Exile and Return. These events show God at work. How does Christ share the work of the Father? Compare the following passages. What is God doing in the Old Testament passages? What is Jesus doing in the passages from Mark's Gospel?

Genesis 1:1	Mark 1:1
Exodus 24:12	Mark 1:21-22
Numbers 21:7-9	Mark 1:29-2:12
Job 9:1-8; Sirach 24:5	Mark 4:39; 6:47-50
Exodus 16	Mark 6:35-42
Exodus 24:9-10	Mark 9:1-8

Saint Mark opens his Gospel with a bold proclamation. Mark challenges his readers, as they hear the words of Jesus is proclaiming and see the deeds he is performing, to acclaim Jesus as the true, divine Son of God – and to follow Jesus faithfully, Just as Jesus was faithful to his Father in Heaven.

As modern readers of Saint Mark's Gospel who increasingly live in a pagan culture, we too must answer Mark's challenge. Do we acclaim Jesus as the Son of God? Do we live our lives so that others recognize us as adopted children, sons and daughters, of God the God the Father? And followers of his divine Son, Jesus?

### COMMIT - DAY 2: The Way of the Lord

Having declared Jesus's divinity in his first verse, Saint Mark prepares us for Jesus and his ministry by combining three different Old Testament passages. Mark draw from the prophets, Isaiah (40:2-3) and Malachi (3:1) and from the Book of Exodus (23:20). Here is a comparison that includes Mark's text and three Old Testament passages.

Exodus 23:20	Isaiah 40:3	Malachi 3:1	Mark 1:2-3
“Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on <b>the way</b> and to bring you to the place which I have prepared.”	“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare <b>the way</b> of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”	“Behold, I send my messenger to prepare <b>the way</b> before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming says the Lord of hosts.”	“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare <b>the way</b> of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

What will this new “way of the Lord” look like? As it was at the time of the first exodus, it will be a way of liberation and redemption. But it will be a liberation deeper than that of political liberation from the Roman oppression under which God’s people lived in the first century. That this is the case is foreshadowed by the preaching of John the Baptist. How does Mark describe John’s preaching in the wilderness in Mark 1:4?

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As we continue in Mark’s Gospel, we will find that this “way of the Lord” that brings liberation and redemption travels upon the “way of the Cross.” When Divine Love and sinful humanity meet, we find two things: mercy and the Cross. The way of the Lord is to include suffering and self-sacrifice. As follower of Jesus Christ, we will be invited to take up our cross and follow our Lord along this way.

How do we prepare for the Lord to guide us on the way? What makes us ready for Divine Mercy?

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What obstacles might we expect on the way?

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<b>COMMIT - DAY 3: LECTIO: - Repent and Believe</b>
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John the Baptist describes Jesus as he who is “mightier than I” (Mark 1:7). After humbly submitting to John’s baptism and then spending forty days in the wilderness, Jesus is about to begin his public ministry, a ministry that will include many mighty signs, wonders, and healings. Saint Mark transitions

his readers from John the Baptist to Jesus and his ministry in two short verses that we will reflect on in our lectio.

**LECTIO:** The practice of praying with Scripture begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

***“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.’”***

Saint Mark gives us the when, where, and what of the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry.

When does Jesus’s ministry begin? \_\_\_\_\_

Where does it begin? \_\_\_\_\_

What does Jesus begin doing? \_\_\_\_\_

When Jesus begins to preach, he says the “time is fulfilled.” To what “time” is he referring?

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**MEDITATIO:** *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading is followed by *meditation*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reasons for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the above verse.

*This is the first word of the preaching of Jesus, which significantly enough is linked with readiness to believe: “Repent and believe the Good News” (Mk 1:15) The fulfillment of God’s time becomes a summons to conversion, which is in the first place an effect of grace. It is the Spirit who impels each of us to “return into ourselves” and to see the need to go back to the Father’s house (cf. Lk 15:17-20). Examination of conscience is therefore one of the most decisive moments of life. It places each individual before the truth of his own life.*

– John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, no. 11

As we hear Jesus’s call to “repent and believe” and Pope Saint John Paul II’s exhortation to “place ourselves before the truth of our own life,” take a moment to do an examination of conscience. To help with this, review the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1 -17), or the Beatitudes (see Matthew 5:1-11), or Saint Pauls’ exhortation on love (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Is there something you need to repent of, to hand over to God today, so you can receive his mercy and be transformed by it? Is there something God is calling you to do today to share his love?

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**ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO:** Having read and meditates on today's Scripture passage, take some time to pray – bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*) – and to be receptive to God's grace in silence (*contemplation*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolution*) to respond to God's prompting of you heart in today's prayer.

## COMMIT - DAY 4: Baptism of the Lord



The Jordan is no mere waterway. It is a hugely significant river, which marks the definitive entrance to the Promised Land. Crossing the banks of the Jordan was the completion of the deliverance begun in the Book of Exodus. To have the people come to the east side of the Jordan River, repent and be baptized, and then enter anew into the Promised Land was like resetting the clock, a chance for God's people to live in faithfulness to the covenant.

The waters of the Jordan River also brought healing and conversion to one outside the covenant family (see the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-17). The Syrian commander is healed of his leprosy and comes to faith in the God of Israel, saying, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). This healing of body and soul looked forward to a time when all the nations would come to worship the one true God.

The Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of the fulfillment of those events. These passages help to explain why it is that our Lord, though he has no need of repentance or forgiveness of sins, nonetheless seeks our John and is baptized. Jesus humbly shows us the way to new life.

*Our Lord voluntarily submitted himself to the baptism of St. John, intended for sinners, in order to "fulfill all righteousness." Jesus' gesture is a manifestation of his self-emptying. The Spirit who had hovered over the waters of the first creation descended then on the Christ as a prelude of the new creation, and the Father revealed Jesus as his "beloved Son." In his Passover Christ opened to all men the fountain of Baptism. He had already spoken of his Passion, which he was about to suffer in Jerusalem, as a "Baptism" with which he had to be baptized. The blood and water that flowed from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus are types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life. From then on, it is possible "to be born of water and the Spirit" in order to enter the Kingdom of God. CCC, 1224-1225*

**COMMIT - DAY 5: Truth and Beauty**



***Temptation of Christ - by Rubens 1620***

In 1575 the Jesuits founded a monastery with a chapel at Antwerp, and in 1615 they began construction on a magnificent new church, dedicated to Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Peter Paul also a humanist scholar and political diplomat, was involved in various aspects of the project, designing elements for the façade and painting two major altarpieces as well as thirty-nine ceiling paintings for the aisles and upper gallery.

In 1622, the year in which the Order was celebrating the canonization of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier (canonized by Pope Gregory XV on March 12, 1622), a member of the order published an account of the solemnity, including a description of the recently completed construction of the Antwerp church:

*The magnificence of the interior of the edifice turns the thoughts to the abode of heaven. It is difficult to say what most strikes the eye, the brilliance of the gold or the polish of the*

*marble. The floor, in blue and white marble, gleams like a mirror; the vault of the central nave is entirely covered with golden roses which shine between an uninterrupted series of gilded frames, giving the impression of a sky of massive gold... The aisles and galleries have flat ceilings, but so beautiful that nothing would be gained by replacing them by vaults; were they of gold, they could not be richer than they are at present. In fact, they are covered with paintings which represent side by side the mysteries of religion drawn from the Old and New Testament, or else celebrated saints of both sexes. All are executed and signed by a most famous painter, who appears to have surpassed himself in triumphing over the difficulty of situation and perspective.*

Sadly, in 1718, less than a century after its completion, the church was struck by lightning and within a few hours the greater part of the building was consumed by fire, and the ceiling paintings, which were canvas set into wooden frames, were destroyed. Thankfully Rubens original work survives in two preliminary drawings and twenty-nine oil preparatory sketches (five in gray monochrome and twenty-four colored), which are held in various collections.

Saint Mark describes how Jesus's years of ministry begin with the Spirit driving Jesus out into the wilderness immediately after his baptism. In the *Temptation of Christ* ceiling panel, Rubens inserts us into the story as Satan makes his first attempt to tempt Jesus. The devil doesn't simply point out the stones but picks one up and extends it toward Jesus. As we view the image, we can hear the devil's words: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matthew 4:3). The *Temptation of Christ* is paired next to the painting of *David and Goliath*, in which Goliath is laid out upon the ground with David about to cut off his head. Just as David is victorious over his enemy, so too Jesus is victorious and does not give in to the devil's temptation.

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned in the text or the discussion questions. List any personal applications you gained from the lessons. What challenges you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you've learned into specific action?

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