

Prayer and Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings – 1/13/19

Monday – Read Mark 1:1-3; Isaiah 40:3-5; and Malachi 3:1. **Prepare the Way of the Lord.** Judaism was longing for a revival or prophecy, so John's appearance and message caused great excitement. Mark quotes Isaiah and Malachi to speak of the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry to prepare the way for Jesus. John looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, and he prepared the way by proclaiming the prophetic message to get ready for the coming of the Lord. The voice crying out in the wilderness reminds us of the importance of the wilderness in salvation history. Salvation traditionally comes from the wilderness. Mark's Gospel also looks forward just as eagerly to when Jesus will return, and we may join in John's ministry to prepare the way of the Lord by praying for people and sharing our testimony with them. As we sang on Sunday: *Prepare the way of the Lord, and all people will see the salvation of our God.* Ask God to use you to prepare the way of the Lord.

Tuesday – Read Mark 1:4-5 and Luke 3:7-14. **John's Baptism of Repentance.** John preaches and baptizes, the people sin and repent, and God forgives. *Metanoia* means *to repent*, or *to have a change of heart that results in changed behavior*. John's baptism was a sign of repentance, and the imagery of John's baptism was very powerful. By stepping into the water people were saying, "We wish to be God's people wholly and completely. We wish to be forgiven and made right with God." And then symbolically the water of the Jordan washed away their sins and carried them downstream into the Dead Sea where nothing could live. The sins you carried with you have been carried down to the Dead Sea. They cannot live again. Spend some time confessing your sins, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you repent.

Wednesday – Read Mark 1:6-8 and Ezekiel 36:25-29. **Jesus Will Baptize You.** John the Baptist's clothing resembles the prophet Elijah in II Kings 1:8: "A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist." John's call to repentance and baptism with water for the forgiveness of sins prepared people for Jesus to come into their lives. John proclaims that Jesus is greater and more powerful than John is, and he announces what Jesus will do: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." To be baptized with the Holy Spirit suggests a permanent change in a person's relationship with God. Jesus will fill people with the Holy Spirit and set them apart for the holy work of the Good News of God. As you pray, ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you as you seek to participate in Jesus' ministry in our church.

Thursday – Read Mark 1:9-11 and Isaiah 42:1, 64:1. **The Baptism of Jesus.** Jesus is the Lord whose coming was foretold by the prophet Isaiah. Jesus' ministry is the answer to the long-deferred hope in Isaiah 64:1 which says: *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down....* In no Gospel is the humanity of Jesus more transparent nor his divine authority more striking than in Mark's Gospel. All three persons of the Trinity are present at Jesus' baptism. As Jesus, the Son, emerges from the water, he sees the Holy Spirit descend as a dove, and he hears the voice of his Father say, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." In Mark's Gospel only Jesus hears the Father's voice. *Epiphany* means *manifestation*, and in Jesus' baptism he is revealed to be the Son of God. The entire Gospel which will follow is the story of Jesus and what God did through him. As you pray, consider the way Jesus has come to us to minister to us and save us.

Friday – Read Galatians 3:26-29 and Romans 6:1-11. **Our Baptism.** Why should we be baptized? Why does baptism matter? The baptism of Jesus establishes his identity. The baptism of believers establishes our identity. Jesus is who God says he is, we are who God says we are. Above all other labels we may carry, in Christ Jesus we are daughters and sons of God, *for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. Baptism matters because we are who God says we are. The identity you received in your baptism is revealed with convincing power in the unfolding story of your life and death... and resurrection. As you pray, consider how your baptism has shaped your identity and the way you live out your faith. If you have not been baptized, talk to Jesus about why he is calling you to be baptized and follow him.

Saturday – Read Mark 1:12-13; Genesis 22:1-14; and Hebrews 4:13-16. **Tested in the Wilderness.** The wilderness is the dwelling place of forces hostile to God, the residue of the primeval chaos that menaces human life. At times it seems like God is absent in the wilderness, but through times of struggle and testing we find that God is actually present even in the wilderness. The Greek verb *peirazo* means *to tempt or test*. This story is a test of strength between Jesus and Satan. Jesus is stronger. God may use a time of testing to prepare us for serving God's mission. Jesus passed the test. As children of God, we may expect to be driven into the wilderness and caught up in the cosmic struggle between God and evil. Ask God to sustain you when you are tested and tempted.

Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 43:1-7 Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22.

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