

**Reflection on the Gospel: Second Sunday of Advent Year B**  
**(Mark 1:1-8)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The opening verse of Mark's gospel evokes the opening words of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The whole of Mark's story of Jesus is presented as the beginning of a faith journey into which the listener/reader is invited. In some manuscripts of the Greek text, there are only five words in this verse, seven in others manuscripts, and twelve in our English translation. So short a statement and a world of meaning that foreshadows the key elements of the story to follow! The term gospel (*euangelion*) means good news. It originally referred to the news of victory delivered by a messenger, usually in time of war. The good news in this context is about Jesus or Joshua, a name meaning "Yahweh saves". The reader knows immediately that this Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One of God, Israel's longed for Messiah. The actors within the story have to discover this truth as the drama unfolds. The two additional words present Jesus as son of God, or as one having the characteristics of God.

The gospel writer identifies John the Baptist as the messenger who proclaims the need to prepare the way for the arrival of a new Presence in our world. Mark creates the impression that something big is happening here. John draws massive crowds from city and country alike. They come to him in the wilderness. The wilderness theme recalls Israel's experience in the Sinai desert. Wilderness is the place of testing and of new beginnings for God's people, the place of God's coming or God's "advent" to Israel. As the gospel unfolds, Jesus will be impelled by the Spirit into the wilderness where he will pass the tests that Israel failed.

This reading invites us to prepare for God's advent, God's coming, by ritualising *metanoia* (usually translated as repentance), and thus being ready for the One who comes. The translation "repentance" does not convey the nuances of the Greek term *metanoia* which literally means a "change of mind" and suggests an "expansion of horizons". God's advent demands a whole new mindset that will predispose us to receive the gift of God's forgiveness.

Mark's depiction of John evokes the image of the prophet Elijah in 2 Kings 8 and the "hairy mantle" of the prophet in Zechariah 13:4. John is a prophet who, like the prophets of old, calls God's people to reconsider where they stand in relation to God. He is also the one who heralds the advent of the "stronger" One who will baptize "with the Holy Spirit". And yet there is nothing in the subsequent narrative about Jesus baptizing. As we reflect attentively on Mark's gospel this liturgical year, we might discover for ourselves the meaning of this little phrase.