

“The Beginning, Continuance, and End Goal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”

God the Holy Spirit, working through St. Mark the Evangelist, signals right from the beginning that this is just the BEGINNING of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words – the good news of Jesus Christ has not come to an end – it continues.

The Season of Advent focuses on the Scriptures threefold “coming” of the Christ – His coming in the flesh with His birth at Bethlehem – His coming to us in these last days through His Word and Sacraments – and His final coming on the Last Day, to judge the living and the dead.

The birth of Jesus Christ is not the end of the Gospel – but St. Mark shows how it continues, as Jesus goes around preaching, teaching and healing – as He suffers, dies, and is raised to life – and then, as it comes to its end goal, with His Ascension into heaven and the life everlasting.

Dearly beloved, YOU are the target of His Gospel. Jesus Christ doesn’t come for Himself – He comes for you, and for all sinners. And so, it is no surprise that the threefold coming of the Christ is mirrored in the life of the Christian.

Already in the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah preaches this Gospel. He speaks of “a voice” crying in the wilderness – and that voice is John the Baptist. John is the last of a long line of voices that prepared God’s people for the coming of the Lord.

The Lord is coming, “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Why does the Lord, the Promised Savior come? To “comfort my people, says your God” – to “speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist’s divinely appointed ministry of preparing God’s people for the way of the Lord is succinctly stated in one verse. “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

John is called the Baptizer – not just because he baptizes, but because he preaches a “baptism of repentance” – FOR, or, INTO “the forgiveness of sins.”

This baptism, like the Gospel, is just the beginning – not the end. It’s not a one-time thing that happens in the past, and is left in the past – it inaugurates the Gospel ministry of Jesus Christ that continues, even into eternity.

Baptism is the beginning of the Gospel of Christ – for that One Baptism unites you to Christ in His death and resurrection. The good news of Jesus doesn’t end with His birth, or resurrection, or ascension – but continues eternally. Just as St. Mark tracks the good news of Jesus Christ throughout his gospel – so the good news of Jesus Christ continues throughout your life.

St. Mark records not just the BEGINNING, but the continuance of Jesus’ Gospel work as He preaches, teaches, and heals the sick. The first sermon of Jesus, recorded by Mark is this: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.”

Jesus continually calls sinners to repentance. That is why you, who are baptized into Christ, hear His sermon over and over again – “repent and believe in the gospel.”

Repentance is the beginning of the Gospel. First of all, Jesus convicts you of your sin – leads you to believe that you cannot ransom yourself – and shows your desperate need for a Savior. This is Christ’s work, not yours.

He convicts you of sin, sentences you to death – and then proclaims to repentant sinners that His blood redeems all sin – so that by faith, He might deliver you from your bondage to sin and death.

Repentance is literally changing the way one thinks, or believes – it is Christ changing the way you think about your sin, and about God’s forgiveness. We think that we have to take care of our own sin, make up for our own failures – or, when sin overwhelms us – in despair, we think that there is no way God can love someone like me, forgive me for what I’ve done, and save a wretch like me.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that it is not up to you to defeat the devil, the world and your sinful flesh. In Christ, and by His forgiveness – your “warfare is ended.” The Lord comforts you by pardoning all your iniquity. His gracious forgiveness overwhelms all your sins.

Baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection – your sin and death have been put to death – and now, in Christ, you are raised to a new life, a new beginning.

Through baptism, you are transported INTO a new life, a new state of being – for IN Christ – the sinner is forgiven, the guilty is pardoned, the captive is set free, and those dead in their sins are raised to new life.

That Gospel continues in your life – and through you – is good news for your neighbor. Like Jesus, you see the needs of those around you, and you sacrifice yourself for their sake. That’s good news for your spouse, who needs your forgiveness – for your children, who need your gracious service – and for the stranger, who through your good deeds, see the reflection of God’s love for them, in Christ Jesus.

To be baptized into Christ is to continually repent, confess your sins, and believe that by His blood you are forgiven. Baptized into Christ, you follow where He leads – through the wilderness of this world – through death and the grave – to your ascension into heaven and the life everlasting.

Dearly beloved, what God has begun in you, through Jesus Christ – He continues to work throughout your days – and will bring to their end when Christ returns again in glory.

Then the BEGINNING of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is brought to its end – when He takes you to live with Him, and with all who believe and are baptized – in your heavenly, and eternal home. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.