

Meet the King

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[0 : 0 0] the reading this evening is from mark chapter 1 verses 1 to 15 and that is on page 1002 of the pew bibles mark chapter 1 verse 1 to 15 the beginning of the good news about jesus the messiah the son of god as it is written in isaiah the prophet i will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way a voice of one calling in the wilderness prepare the way for the lord make straight paths for him and so john the baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins the whole judean countryside and all the people of jerusalem went out to him confessing their sins they were baptized by him in the river jordan john wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey and this was his message after me comes the one more powerful than i the straps of whose sandals i am not worthy to stoop down and untie i baptize you with water but he will baptize you with the holy spirit at that time jesus came from nazareth in galilee and was baptized by john in the jordan just as jesus was coming up out of the water he saw heaven being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove and a voice came from heaven you are my son whom i love with you i am well pleased at once the spirit sent him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by satan he was with the wild animals and angels attended him after john was put in prison jesus went into galilee proclaiming the good news of god the time has come he said the kingdom of god has come near repent and believe the good news amen good evening um last time uh i started the series in mark was at our last church and i remember that the preacher who opened the series uh was uh probably should say about a guest preacher that sunday and he said it was his favorite of the four gospels and the reason that he gave was that it is the shortest of the gospels and he was only half joking i think his point was that it is dramatic and punchy and packed with theological uh richness ironically it then took more than two years for us to work our way through uh the book of mark in that church with very few breaks i can assure you with some confidence that it won't take us two years to work our way through mark at saint silas and in the next 20 or 25 minutes or so we're going to begin to unpack these opening verses of mark's gospel that were read for us just now and we're going to be uh looking at the prologue of mark then under three headings the incredible announcement of the good news the prophetic fulfillment of the good news and the cosmic affirmation of the good news but before we begin let's just bow our heads and pray again

let's pray father we give thanks to you for the good news that is found in mark's gospel about jesus christ we pray that this evening and throughout the series you would show us through the power of your spirit the lord jesus for who he truly is the messiah and the son of god in his name we pray amen firstly then the incredible announcement of good news the opening words of mark's gospel set the gospel set the stage as it were for the rest of his account about jesus he starts with the words the beginning of the gospel or good news as it's translated here that's where we get mark's gospel or john's gospel from and it's good news about a person jesus and then in verses 14 to 15 jesus's own first words in mark's gospel also announce the good news the time has come the kingdom has come near repent and believe the good news and so we learn that the good news about jesus is also the good news of god and so straight away we can see that mark's opening passage this prologue to the rest of his dramatic story is bookended by these references to good news so clearly this idea of good news is a key one for mark now we love a good news story don't we we're so used to bad news that we say that no news is good news or when a good news story does appear in our social media it can go viral but these good news stories often tend to be highly sentimental pulling at the heartstrings or sometimes they're just downright odd for example a story that appeared in my feed this week i don't know what it tells you about me but a story appeared in my feed this week said that eating insects can be good for the planet europeans should eat more of

them so maybe john the baptist was onto something after all with his diet of locusts and honey and if you want to experiment you can go to www.souschef.com or oneword.co.uk forward slash collections forward slash edible hyphen insects that's not an endorsement it's uh more of a dare but see how you get on or not um but anyway we should be aware that the good news uh in mark would have had a very particular meeting for mark and his readers it was usually an announcement uh of victory in battle or uh the enthronement of a king and we've had uh good news announcements in the last couple of weeks uh from the uh ukraine after they pushed invaders out of the haki region and no doubt be plenty of good news coverage uh the coronation of king charles in due course but usually an announcement of victory or good uh good news of the enthronement of a king and in this case as we'll find out as we go through mark over the next weeks you can say that it's a bit of both a victory and an enthronement and so in this very first verse mark shares with us his readers two really important things about jesus that he wants us to take note of firstly that he is the messiah and secondly that he is the son of god and so in this first verse this idea that jesus is messiah and that he is the son of god we also have um structural markers uh which uh the book of mark is based around so act one of mark ends with peter's declaration that jesus is the messiah and then the climax of acts of act two of mark is the centurion's declaration that this man must be the son of god and so in some sense mark gives the game away doesn't he probably should have given a spoiler alert uh here so my apologies but he gives it away by telling us up front these crucial statements about jesus's identity which will take the characters within his story the rest of the story to work out uh for themselves and make uh form an opinion on and in the end uh many of these characters within mark won't be able to perceive uh who jesus really is and they will reject him as the messiah will reject him as the son of god okay so these are huge claims that mark is making about jesus and if you've been around church uh for a while they might be such familiar terms that we're tempted just to gloss over them but mark headlines them for a reason the good news is about jesus the messiah and messiah literally means the anointed one the chosen one in hebrew israel's kings for example were anointed with oil as they were chosen and set apart for god's service but the really important thing for us is that by jesus's time god's people were expecting not just a messiah but the promised messiah the king who would defeat their enemies and bring salvation to them so this is a strong claim that mark's making but that's not all that mark's claiming here because the good news is also about jesus who is the son of god which was a title sometimes given to roman emperors depending on how grandiose sense of self they might have had but even more significantly for the jewish people this title had royal and divine connotations that went back more than a thousand years before jesus time and to a promise that god had made to king david that one of his descendants would reign forever as king so right from the off mark is telling us his readers that jesus is the unique son of god god's chosen king the divine king who's come to save his people and by the way that's what the name jesus means god saves god is salvation and so clearly this is a huge claim but i think it's uh it's easier for for us to miss just how bold a claim it is just how audacious just how dangerous even this claim is that mark is making consider these two things firstly uh there's an elephant in the room for mark's readers and that's that for the most part they would have already known that jesus had suffered the most humiliating uh punishment imaginable crucifixion death on a cross and that makes jesus uh in in their esteem an unlikely candidate for the role of messiah it's certainly not how they would have imagined a savior to be but mark is adamant he sticks to his guns jesus is the messiah the son of god and he's determined to prove it and the rest of the gospel will unfold and unpack that and secondly what mark's claiming here would have not only sounded implausible at first glance to his audience but these are highly provocative even treasonable claims and to help us to think about that we're going to fast forward about 1500 years to scotland in the year of 1552 and that was eight years before scotland converted to protestant christianity in 1560 and incidentally four years before tenants opened its brewery in glasgow in 1556 and so you can infer what you will from that about the priorities of this city setting up its brewery four years before sorting out its church but 1552 was the first public performance of an epic play a satire of the three estates or in old scots in satire of the three estates now the chances are you'll never have heard of it even if you are scottish and i think it's actually only ever been performed a handful of times the only reason i know about it is for some reason we were forced to study it at school but it was a highly dangerous play for its author sir david lindsey because it was religious dynamite scathingly critical of the rulers and the monarchy and especially the state of the church in his day which was abusing its power and corrupting the message of the gospel and because the play so

blatantly pushed for radical reform its author ran the risk of imprisonment or even execution for treason he could be put to death for this just about the only thing that i can remember about this play is that it was such a risk to its author's life that the play begins with a great big disclaimer denying responsibility for its content and so when the first character comes on he basically tells the audience not to take what follows too seriously after all it's just for pastime and play well the author had a serious message to get across but he wasn't willing to die for it if he could possibly help it mark on the other hand is completely unapologetic that jesus is the one we've been waiting for the divine king come to rescue his people though it be treason to rome and blasphemy to the jewish authorities there's no disclaimer here this is a message worth dying for the beginning of the good news about jesus the beginning of the good news about jesus except that the beginning of the good news about jesus doesn't begin with jesus instead we're introduced to another character and in verse two to three mark demonstrates that the arrival of john the baptist has long been foretold by the old testament prophets and we're on to our second heading now the prophetic fulfillment of the good news the arrival of john the baptist has long been fulfilled by the old testament prophets i say prophets plural because the quotations as much from the prophet malachi and exodus for that matter as it is from isaiah i always think it's a bit of a shame for malachi that he doesn't get name checked but i suppose he gets his rewards in heaven but actually the thing is isaiah is hugely important hugely important for mark's gospel mark's going to unpack his uh gospel in various ways uh and god's promise through the prophet isaiah of restoration and rescue and recreation is going to be to the forefront these themes uh from isaiah will run throughout mark's narrative and at significant moments in mark's gospel we'll find that there are more quotations from isaiah so that's a possible reason at least why mark wishes to highlight isaiah so prominently at the expense of the others but it's also worth just uh stepping back and asking why why does mark go here to john the baptist first why not the nativity accounts for instance i think what he's doing is this he's showing that the good news is the fulfillment of god's promises you may have just arrived in the city as a fresher if so uh you're very welcome here in glasgow and at saint silas or you may remember what it was like to arrive at a fresher in a new city or starting a new job uh somewhere different and it can be daunting can't it it's a pretty big deal to start a radically new phase of your life but just imagine that your parents or guardian had signed you up for a course of their choosing behind your back without your prior knowledge and one day just packed you and your things into the back of a car and just drove you to an undisclosed city dumped you unceremoniously at the local halls of residence and left you to get on with it well that would be terrible parenting wouldn't it that's not what god is like he's a good father whose words can be counted on who acts on promises he's given his people beforehand who acts on behalf of those who wait on him and so mark shows how the good news is stamped with god's hallmark fulfilling yet radically transforming the old testament hopes and expectations so let's compare through the prophets in verses two and three god says he'll send a messenger a voice will be heard and when john appears with a message in verse four his voice is heard preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and in the prophecy we're told that this will take place in the wilderness and sure enough when john the baptist arrives on the scene it's in the wilderness and because our focus rightly is on jesus we sometimes forget that john's such a big deal at this time drawing a huge uh... uh... uh... city dwellers from jerusalem rural types alike a true uh... popular crossover hit in his time and then there's his outfit and diet which we've already mentioned which let's face it is pretty far out verse six john wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and i was trying to think back but uh... even in all my years at the art school i don't recall uh... seeing anybody who'd quite fit that description see many other things but i don't think anything uh... but quite that description cutting about in a garment of camel hair could be wrong in that camel hair uh... camel mohair might have been all the rage for i know but actually it's a significant clue here that mark's given us as to john [20 : 19] the baptist's identity the description is strikingly similar to the prophet elijah in two kings in fact it's uncanny john the baptist is basically wearing the elijah costume but what's the significance of this well um there's all sorts of things that we don't have time to get into but importantly for us malachi later on in his prophecy identified the promised messenger as an elijah like figure who would come before and pave the way for the lord god himself so in both isaiah chapter 40 and malachi chapter 3 first the messenger comes and then the lord will come that's the pattern and then just when we're expecting the lord god to come jesus appears onto the scene after me says john in verse 7 comes the one more powerful than i the straps of whose sandals i'm not worthy to stoop down and untie and at that time jesus came from nazareth in galilee so do notice that this is another

massive claim that mark's making here by positioning jesus as the one who comes after the messenger he is in effect equating jesus to the lord god another claim for jesus's uh divinity he's saying that the lord has come his name is jesus he's the messiah and so jesus comes down from galilee and was baptized by john in the jordan and this sets the stage for some seriously spectacular uh supernatural fireworks if i can put it like that and we're onto our last heading now the cosmic affirmation of the good news most folk i imagine when they went down to be baptized in the river jordan would have been uh confessing their sins and immersed in the water and then come up out of the water and that would be that but not so with jesus look again at verse 10 as jesus was coming up out of the water immediately he saw the heavens being torn open now that's an awesome scene the heavens being torn open just try to picture that and it's also the fulfillment of isaiah's longing cry that god would come down to us oh he prays that you would rend the heavens and come down and then jesus sees the holy spirit descending on him like a dove and a voice cries out from heaven you are my son whom i love with you i am well pleased in one sense we've already heard god's voice haven't we through the prophets who act as god's mouthpiece to his people but now we have this extraordinary scene at jesus's baptism of god's voice directly affirming jesus as his chosen king whom he loves and we're told uh three things you are my son you are my beloved to my love and with you i am well pleased now there's an overwhelming uh depth of richness here uh that can just be bewildering i think that's okay we don't need to get our heads around everything this evening i think mark would be happy for his readers uh simply to marvel at the wonders he's describing but these two cosmic events the spirit

descending and the voice from heaven were god's personal commissioning for the task he'd sent jesus to accomplish in which jesus was literally about to begin so let's pick up at verse 12 at once the spirit sent him into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by satan again there's a lot going on here but just consider this as we draw to a conclusion in the garden of eden adam was first addressed by god he was first addressed by god and then tempted by satan here in the wilderness jesus was first addressed by god and then tempted by satan and so here for the very first time in the whole story arc of the bible is one who has come to engage and do battle directly with the old enemy satan could this finally be the long promised serpent crusher one thing's for sure this initial conflict with satan lays the groundwork for all that follows throughout jesus's ministry so we're to stay tuned we have in these opening verses of mark's gospel the opportunity to marvel afresh at the awesome richness of this good news about a person called jesus the messiah who is the son of god and who has come to fulfill all god's promises let's respond to that in prayer and then we'll respond to that in song praise let's pray heavenly father we give thanks to you for the good news about jesus we thank you that you sent your son in order to deal with the problem of sin to deal with the enmity of satan and to restore us to yourself lord god we thank you for the richness of mark's gospel and we pray that over the next coming weeks and months that you would feed us by your words and instruct us in your ways in your name lord jesus we pray amen