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**Sunday 18 February 2024 to**

**Sunday 25 February 2024**

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Sunday 18 February 2024

**The Spirit leads the Messiah**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness (Mark 1:12).***

Read [Mark 1:9–15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A9-15&version=NRSVUE)

I’ve always thought of Mark as the action movie of the gospels. He gives us one scene after another, with very little rest in between. In our passage today, we have Jesus’ baptism, forty days in the wilderness, temptation, John’s arrest, the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and ‘repent and believe’. All of that happens in seven verses. We also see the Holy Spirit at work, descending on Jesus at his baptism and leading Jesus into the wilderness. I believe Mark wants us to understand that the Spirit keeps doing this – leading Jesus from one scene to another. Mark is eager to show us that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that as we see who he is, we, too, will want to follow the Spirit’s lead and follow Jesus.

Having put our trust in Jesus, we have peace with God; we have eternal life; we have so much – but we are not promised a trouble-free life. We sometimes forget that ‘to follow’ means to go through the same things the person you are following has gone through. We see in the gospels that Jesus faced many difficulties. He went through hunger, thirst, weariness, suffering, betrayal, and so much more. Remember Mark 8:34 (take up your cross). Of course, Jesus had many good times with friends and family; he enjoyed many a good meal with good conversation and, no doubt, enjoyed much of the good creation (that he created).

Like Jesus, the Spirit is going to lead us through various action scenes. We are going to go through glorious times and challenging times – and even devastating times. As we do, remember that we are not the action star – Jesus is! The Holy Spirit, whom we received in our baptism, is with us. Jesus promised he would never leave us. We are the precious children of our Heavenly Father.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for fulfilling your promises and sending Israel’s Messiah – my dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Help me to follow your Spirit’s leading so that my life may be based on repenting and believing in Jesus. In his mighty name, I pray. Amen.***

*Glenn is the pastor of St John’s Lutheran Church in Esperance and also looks after St Paul’s Lutheran Church in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. Glenn has been married to Karen for 38 years, and they have two grown sons – and their first grandchild is on the way (due March 2024).*

Monday 19 February 2024

**Never too old to meet the Messiah**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah (Luke 2:26).***

Read [Luke 2:22–40](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A22-40&version=NRSVUE)

Our passage today includes the wonderful story of Simeon. A man who loved and trusted the Lord God of Israel and had been promised by the Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. While we often picture him as quite an old man, please note that the passage does not give us any indication of his age. However, given that upon seeing the infant Jesus, he is ready and willing to die (verse 29), it would seem he has lived a full life.

As we saw yesterday, once again, the Holy Spirit is involved in moving people – this time, ensuring that Simeon is in the temple on this day that the holy family is present. The Holy Spirit is still at work moving people – and moving you.

When did you first see the Lord’s Messiah? Were you, like me, brought up in a Christian family and taught about Jesus from when you were born (and even when you were in your mother’s womb)? Were your parents moved by the Holy Spirit to baptise you as a child into the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour? Or did the Holy Spirit work in you as an adult, leading you to see who Jesus was and is? No matter your age, the Holy Spirit desires to move you towards Jesus. He wants to do this each and every day! He wants to continue to open your eyes to see that Jesus has lived the life you failed to do; he has died for you, and his resurrection proves you are forgiven.

***Almighty God, forgive me when I have not heeded your Spirit’s prompting. Open my eyes and ears so that I can see and hear clearly. Keep me focused on your dear Son, Jesus. Keep moving me by your Spirit. Amen.***

Tuesday 20 February 2024

**Being the parents of the Messiah**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers (Luke 2:47).***

Read [Luke 2:41–52](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A41-52&version=NRSVUE)

Jesus' miraculous inception and birth involved angels and shepherds. In those early days, not only was he prophesied over (see yesterday’s reading), but wise men came bearing gifts. Wow – and, of course, this was followed by a hasty escape to Egypt so that the mad king couldn’t kill Jesus. Being the parents of the Messiah was no easy mission!

Luke tells us that even though Jesus' parents lived in Galilee, they took the young Jesus to Jerusalem every year for Passover. Surely the Messiah should be brought to the City of David and spend time in the temple. When better to do that than during the most holy time of Passover? And now that Jesus was 12 years old, they lost him! They have misplaced God’s promised Messiah. Imagine how they felt ... As many commentators point out, Mary probably assumed that Jesus was travelling with Joseph and the men, and Joseph assumed he was travelling with Mary and the women and children. However, Jesus was in his Father’s house, back in Jerusalem.

I know that awful feeling of looking down and not seeing the child who was with me mere moments ago: the panicked prayers sent to my Heavenly Father, followed by the praise upon finding the missing child. Many things that God calls us to have scary times – be it a parent, a grandparent, a sibling, a child, a spouse, an employee or an employer. But be assured, Jesus is where he is meant to be. Our Risen Lord Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. He is in the bread and the wine. Jesus has promised to be with us and to never leave us. While we may think we have lost sight of Jesus, he is always holding on to us!

***Gracious Father, you never lose track of me, though I often fail you. Thank you for your forgiveness, mercy and faithfulness. Through your Holy Spirit, keep my eyes focused on the cross and all that your dear Son has done for me. I ask this in his mighty name. Amen.***

Wednesday 21 February 2024

**Preparing the way for the Messiah**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3).***

Read [Luke 3:1–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+3%3A1-14&version=NRSVUE)

How do you prepare the way for the coming Messiah? John does it by calling for repentance – turning back to the Lord God. He realises that some will say that they are sons of Abraham, are circumcised and have no need to repent because they have never turned away from God. John challenges this stand. Their actions do not match their claims. Note how others not only are repenting and being baptised, but they also want to know what to do.

This is the preparation. John is not the promised Messiah, though he is preparing the way. In our passage today, the Messiah is about to come. John is saying to his listeners that now is a good time to come before your Lord God, to confess your sins, receive his mercy and start acting like you are his children by loving your neighbour.

When you are in an important relationship, you want to do whatever you can to make it work and thrive. However, we allow the things in this world to draw us away from that relationship with our Creator. But our God is faithful, and his Messiah is the solution. Our Lord Jesus has defeated sin, death and the devil. John was preparing his listeners for this! What do we need to do? We need to daily repent of our sins – to come to the foot of the cross, hand over our sins and receive the righteousness of Christ – and then go out and be followers of Jesus. Not in our strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

***Faithful Father, it amazes me that even though I continually mess up, you continually forgive me. I need your help to be a better follower of Jesus. Help me to see the opportunities you give me to help others and to point them to Jesus. Make me a better student of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Thursday 22 February 2024

**Why is the Messiah being baptised?**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too (Luke 3:21).***

Read [Luke 3:15–22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+3%3A15-22&version=NRSVUE)

Our passage starts off with John proclaiming the good news. He continues to prepare the way for the Messiah. It is not surprising that the question arises as to whether John might be the Messiah. He points people away from himself to the Messiah, as the one who is to come is far greater. John’s preaching includes holding the leadership to account, and thus, we see this faithful prophet thrown in prison.

We then jump back (verses 21 and 22) to when John baptised Jesus. Wait a minute. Jesus is the one who is without sin. He is the one who always does his Father’s will. He is the one person who does not need to repent or need forgiveness. Why is the Messiah being baptised?

Later, when Jesus is on the cross, he takes upon himself the sins of the world, which includes our sins – past, present and future. We see here that as his ministry starts, he is already on that path and receives baptism just as we need to receive baptism. In baptism, we are joined with Christ’s death and resurrection. In Jesus’ baptism, he accepts the path that leads to him bearing our sins.

Not only does Jesus die for us. Not only does the Father raise him from the dead for us. Jesus also lives the life we fail to live.

***Father, renew in me the joy of your salvation. Remind me of all you have done for me through your dear Son. Thank you for all that you gave me in my baptism. I ask this through my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.***

Friday 23 February 2024

**How does the Messiah resist temptation?**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only”’ (Luke 4:8).***

Read [Luke 3:15–22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+4%3A1-13&version=NRSVUE)

The end of verse two always brings a smile to my face. I have no doubt that Jesus was hungry after 40 days of not eating. What an understatement! The purpose of fasting is to draw one closer to their Heavenly Father, but we see that the evil one sees this as a perfect time to wreck God’s plan. The Word has become flesh (John 1:14), so his hunger and weariness are very real, and the evil one will not miss this opportunity. How will Jesus handle this situation?

In each of the temptations, notice Jesus’ response (see verses 4, 8 and 12). Each time, Jesus quotes a passage from Scripture. In fact, they are all from Deuteronomy – two from chapter 6 and one from chapter 8. Some have suggested that as Jesus fasted, he mediated upon the words of Deuteronomy. The evil one was defeated – for now – but Luke knows that there are more assaults to come: betrayal, torture, death.

I hope you saw how this passage began. Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit and is being guided by that same Holy Spirit. A period of trial does not imply the Holy Spirit has abandoned you. Rather, he is with you, encouraging you to remain focused on Jesus. One of the ways that the Holy Spirit works is through Scripture. We should follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus and get to know our Bibles better. Are we not hearing the Spirit because we are not dwelling in the written word?

Be like Jesus. Know and use the Scripture to resist the devil.

***Heavenly Father, you are my rock and my salvation. Create in me a strong desire to know my Bible better. Create in me a thirst for prayer and a hunger to worship you. Through your Holy Spirit, help me to be more like Jesus. In his name, I pray. Amen.***

Saturday 24 February 2024

**The Messiah has done it!**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it! (Psalm 22:31)***

Read [Psalm 22:23–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+22%3A23-31&version=NRSVUE)

I cannot read any part of Psalm 22 without being reminded of Jesus quoting verse 1 when suffering upon the cross. While the start of this psalm is not part of our reading, it is worth going back and reading at least the first two verses – and then rereading today’s passage.

This psalm gives us a glimpse of the suffering our Lord Jesus went through as he bore our sins. As we read, we gain some small insight into what he endured. Some argue that though Jesus feels separated from his Father because of the sins he is bearing, in quoting this psalm, he also refers to how this psalm ends. That in the midst of hopelessness and despair, God is there. He has not forsaken his servant. In weakness, the true power of God is revealed.

Praise the Lord. He has done it! Sin, death and the devil have been defeated. We have a Saviour who will not only be with us in our darkest days, but he also knows what those days feel like. We will tell this generation – and future generations – all that our Lord Jesus has done and continues to do for us. We will remember his death and resurrection in our baptism and as we gather around his table.

***Father, I adore and praise your name. The ways of the world are surely not your ways. You are the one who shows strength in weakness. Please continue to turn my world and my expectations upside down. Praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Sunday 25 February 2024

**Saving our souls**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Mark 8:36)***

Read [Mark 8:31–38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8%3A31-38&version=NRSVUE)

The stories of *Faust*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and similar tales provide an interesting parallel to the story of the Fall. They portray people who make a deal in order to obtain wealth, knowledge or eternal youth. The stories don’t end well! And, of course, things didn’t go so well for Adam and Eve either – good examples of gaining the world and losing much more.

Life in Australia today seems to be pretty good. We have a high standard of living; wages are on the way up; the homes we have invested in are increasing in value … I could go on. Simultaneously, the news is full of stories of anger and aggression at a local level and unprecedented levels internationally. The ads for some shows on TV are enough to brand us as an adulterous and sinful community. Have we also forfeited our souls in gaining the whole world?

What should our aim in life be? What concerns of God can we focus on? Jesus told the assembled crowd and his disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. We are being called to a life of discipleship, self-denial, obedience and loyalty – loyalty even to death. The prophet Micah put it this way: ‘He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’ (Micah 6:8). This seems like a good way to avoid forfeiting one’s soul and avoid making the Son of Man ashamed of us when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.

***Lord Jesus, thank you for your saving love and your saving gospel. Help me to live my life in a way that brings you glory and does not bring shame to your name. Grant me wisdom to see where justice is needed and to do it. Help me to love kindness and treat everyone with kindness – even those I find challenging. Give me humility so that I may have a servant heart and see your face in all people and treat all with dignity and respect. Amen.***

*Colleen has one husband, two daughters, three granddaughters and a wide range of extended family and friends. She lives in Adelaide and loves the way the various parts of her life intersect. Colleen is involved in numerous committees within the church and community. She loves to read. Colleen coordinates her congregation’s prayer group and is delighted to respond to requests for prayer from friends and family.*