

V.O.C. September 2019

September 1, 2019: A mystery guest has come: Jesus! [Mk. 1: 1-13]

Dear Listeners,

Today I would like to start out by introducing a mystery-guest. I am sure you know about mystery-guests from TV shows, for instance those in which singers participate in an audition, in a contest for the singer with the greatest talents. Every now and then a guest comes up who is not introduced but whose name must be guessed, a mystery-guest. You won't know who it is until he or she steps onto the stage. Well, Mark in his account of the gospel starts out his account with such a mystery-guest. You don't hear him, see him, but he does tell something about him. He makes you curious very much!

Mark begins his account with a quotation from the OT; or actually two quotations, one from the prophecy of Malachi and from Isaiah the prophet. In Malachi's prophecy you hear God Himself say, "I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way." Whose way? Well, of that mystery-guest! And Isaiah says about the same messenger, "Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight!" The Lord is coming, he says! God is on his way! Yes, in Isaiah 40 the prophet describes the Lord as the God of heaven and earth. God is speaking about someone who will be coming to announce the coming of God Himself! Then Mark adds: "This happened when John the Baptist went to the wilderness." Wow! So John is the messenger whom God sent ahead of himself! With John the prophecy is fulfilled that Isaiah prophesied: the Lord is coming!

The people in those days sure realized that John was someone special; a prophet like the ones in the OT. They came to him in great numbers and heard him: "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." That's how John, the messenger of God, prepared the way of the one who was coming: the mystery guest, someone very important! How important? Well this is how John announced him, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." That's the work of a slave, untie the straps of sandals. Wow, who could that be? Well, as Isaiah prophesied, "The Lord!"

I trust, dear listeners that you realize how impressive this is, Mark's opening of his account. Using the OT, he announces the coming of someone whose status is like God's! He may be a mystery-guest still, yet it's clear already that in him it is God Himself who's coming! Actually the OT comes to mind not just through these quotations of the prophets but also in the references to the wilderness, and John's performance in the wilderness, and reading as well that Jesus is driven to the wilderness: it all conjures up the whole story of Israel, God's people, and their wilderness journey. That entire story about the wilderness shows God's great and mighty work of deliverance and his leading of his people to the Promised Land! Also when you read the description of John the Baptist - clothed with camel's hair and wearing a leather belt around his waist and eating locusts and wild honey - you are reminded of Elijah, the OT prophet as well! The entire Old Testament seems to come to the fore in its fulfilment at this time!

So whoever it may be, this mystery-guest, it is clear that it will be someone who comes with the calibre of God; God himself is coming in this mystery-guest! Well, then in verse 9 Mark zooms in on one of the many people who had come out to John: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." Just like that Mark mentions someone, "Jesus." Yes, Mark doesn't keep us in suspense very long when he adds: "And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Wow! What a special moment: the voice of God, the Spirit of God and the Son of God, have come here together! All the attention is directed to this one person: Jesus of Nazareth. God Himself personally points him out to be his beloved Son. God's Spirit descending on Jesus and sending him into the wilderness! As you may know, this is what we would call today the Triune God (or Trinity) appearing on the scene!

This is where Mark shows us the mystery-guest, dear listeners, and who he is this Jesus, God's beloved Son! Perhaps at this point in Mark's account he still remains somewhat of a mystery-guest since we don't hear him speak yet or do anything; yet, he is the one in whom God would come! Yes, Mark does tell about him though that the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness and where he was tempted for forty days by Satan. He was there with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him. Mark doesn't give us any details (like Luke does in his account), but he does show what's behind Jesus time among the people: behind it all is Satan's battle with Jesus, and Jesus victory over Satan! We don't hear much more than that though at this time in Mark 1, yet it does make you curious how this will all unfold.

Does it make you curious, dear listener? Why should you? Well, you may know the name of Jesus; you may wonder why he is so important that millions of people believe in him; you may also consider the fact that Jesus has been served, honoured, and proclaimed for 2000 years already so that you have to admit that he must be very important. Hence, it will be important for you too, dear listeners, to come to know him truly, especially when you learn from this introduction by Mark that in him God came to this world! God is coming to you too! In Jesus you get to see God, see His face, and see what He is like! That's something that you won't learn from any other religion in the world! Then you will need to keep reading in the gospel according to Mark though. How else would you find out who he is, truly, this mystery-guest!

Then it's important, dear listeners, how you continue reading. Quite often people may be willing to do so, but not in order to really get to know him but to see "what will it benefit me?" What's in it for me? You have that in many a conversation too quite often, that someone asks a question and hears the answer, and then continues to talk about himself. That's because people are so inclined to be self-centered, full of themselves. Well, that's something you should watch out for when we are going to see who this mystery-guest, Jesus, is. Listen to him as he reveals himself in the Bible and you will learn as well who he is for you: God's Son! God is well-pleased in him! And when you really get to know him, he will be well-pleasing to you too, a rich blessing. It will be a life-changing experience to see him, hear him, and believe in him! Listen next time!