

Prof Claude Jenkins – Mk. 1.1 for 8 weeks - The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. True or Not: I don't know – but there is a very great deal in that verse and the others we've heard today – but I shall not be keeping you for 8 weeks, probably not for much above 8 minutes.

St. Mark's task is to bring to his readers the good news (Gospel) of who God is and what God has done, does, and will do – and specially in and through the person who is Jesus Christ – about whom he will write in this book which bears his name (and which we shall be reading most Sundays for the next twelve months).

Unlike Matthew and Luke, not told anything about OLJC's birth and the events surrounding it – no mention here of Mary and Joseph, nothing said about Bethlehem and Nazareth, stables and shepherds, wise men and young boys massacred.

Mark launches directly into the deep end: who really is Jesus Christ? No doubt about him being fully human, even though his mother isn't mentioned – for the good news is about the Son of God. Other Gospel writers take a while to come to this earth shattering truth; for Mark, what really matters, what is of supreme importance, is who Jesus is – far more important than being son of Mary, it is absolutely vital to the good news, is that he is Son of God – though no sense in Gospel of playing down the humanity of Jesus in favour of his godness.

It was only because of who he is that he could do all the things that he did do – Isaiah said in first reading, Behold your God, and in Jesus, Mark tells his readers, this prophecy is fulfilled.

Only then, having made this supremely important point, does Mark go on to tell us about John the Baptist, the forerunner, who comes to prepare the way for J by himself being the bearer of good news, repentance and new life through baptism.

John's good news is about the people acknowledging their sinfulness, their having erred and strayed from God's ways like lost

sheep; and then about the coming of one, more powerful and important than himself, who would release the healing and life-giving waters of God's healing on earth, and in so doing would put people right with God, would reconcile God and humankind – and only one who is the Son of God could achieve this.

AND: v. important to remember that – although repentance for sin is a key element of both John's and Jesus' teaching ministry – they are constantly urging their hearers to repent, to turn away from sin and turn towards God – we do not, we cannot repent IN ORDER to acquire or claim forgiveness of sin and release from the burden and weight of sin – that is to put the cart before the horse.

No, we repent because God, in God's infinite love and mercy, has already forgiven us – ours is a God who cannot not forgive – God's nature is always to have mercy and to forgive – no matter what we as God's people may do or may not do, we are forgiven – we repent not to be forgiven, but because we have been forgiven.

The slate is wiped clean, our misdeeds are not held against us – the good news is that we are forgiven, and repentance is our acceptance of God's love and God's mercy and God's forgiveness, and our resolve to turn around and re-focus our lives on *τα του θεου*.

Whether this is what the aged professor lectured about for 8 weeks, I don't know – but it's what occurs to me having read Mark 1.!!