

Good News

I grew up watching and listening to a T.V. newsman by the name of Walter Cronkite. In 1963, the national evening news on television expanded from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. The year before, Cronkite became the anchorman on CBS and he gave his reports of the news until he retired in 1981. There were only 3 television news networks: CBS, NBC and ABC. Cronkite reported on the chaotic decades of the 60's and 70's. I watched him at home before or after dinner. He was on the television in the college dorm, and in the fraternity house. Walter Cronkite was called the most trusted man in America. Television news has certainly changed in the last 35 years.

We have 24-hour news; dozens of channels; and now what our President calls "fake news." I wonder how many have just stopped watching, listening, reading the news? We seem to live in chaotic, turbulent, violent times. Is it worse than the 60's and 70's? It certainly isn't worse than the 1st century. The world Jesus was born into; the world the Gospels emerged from; the world where the Church grew and spread even under extreme persecution was chaotic and violent.

So, Mark starts his Gospel, "the beginning of the good news..." Mark probably met Jesus in Jerusalem before Jesus was crucified. It's possible that the "Garden of Gethsemane" where Jesus was arrested belonged to Mark's family. The New Testament tells us that Mark assisted Paul in his mission; Mark knew Peter and followed him to Rome. Mark, living through this first generation of the Church, experiencing the deaths of Peter and Paul, decided to write down his story of Jesus. Christians in Rome needed to have a record as the first generation of apostles and believers died off. So Mark wrote down what he had learned, what he had witnessed, what he knew was true about Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

Mark wants us to understand the adult Jesus before we celebrate the baby Jesus. His "good news" does not have a story we can read for Christmas. He starts with the ancient prophecy, with the prophet Isaiah, 600 years before, talking about preparing the way for the coming Messiah. Mark then tells us about John, a new age prophet, who understands the Messiah is coming soon. John was such a

powerful preacher and witness that the “whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem...” had to see him, hear him, be baptized.

Finally, Mark tells us that there is even better news! John is just preparing the way ... the Son of God is coming ... and he will bring and baptize with the Spirit of God. I don't think we spend enough time thinking about the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. We will consider their relationship again next week. John the Baptist, Mary, Isaiah and Nicholas are the great Saints of Advent, this short first season of the Church year.

John introduces this “Good News”. We can know this good news in every age – the 1st century; the 60s and 70s, today – it is the same. So, share the good news of Advent to those discouraged, angry, depressed, without hope. John the Baptist's Good News is simply:

- God is with us.
- Jesus is Lord
- The Holy Spirit is here, acting, giving life and leading us to know the truth.

“Our King and Savior draweth nigh – O come let us adore him.”