

*LISTENING TO GOD'S VOICE**PSALM 85: 12, 8-13 NRSV// MARK 1:1-8 NRSV***MONDAY 12/11/23**

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13// LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.85:2 You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin.

Mark 1:1-8// 1:1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.1:2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way.

**REFLECTION** Advent is a time we have new beginnings. At Christmas we have a new birth of our Savior. He brings "new life" to all people on earth. This "new life" has become a new reality that only comes through the birth of Christ. St. Mark is proclaiming the "good news" of God's promises to redeem his people who are lost in the darkness. Redemption is now available for all people who accept God's Divine Son. God, our creator, created us in his image to reflect his glory. In Christ, God manifested in the flesh. 1 Timothy 3:16 reads, "16 Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith. Christ was revealed in a human body and vindicated by the Spirit. He was seen by angels and announced to the nations. He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in glory." (NLT) His purpose is to restore humankind to its original state of loving God and honoring him with our lives. Genesis 1:28 says, "Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."(NLT) By God's power, all things were created. We celebrate Christmas because God now breathes "new life" into human beginning with the birth of Jesus. Let's remember this Advent season to prepare yourselves for this highly remarkable display of God's power and of his grace. Apart from God we could not seek "new life" and salvation.

**PRAYER** Thank you Lord God, for your wonderful detail in creating me, may I see what you see in me and share that with others. In Jesus Name, Amen.

**TUESDAY 12/12/23**

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13// 85:8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.85:9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Mark 1:1-8// 1:3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight, 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

**REFLECTION** This Second week of Advent is a time we prepare for our Savior's birth. We also are to take time to look to the future of his final return. In the meantime we are to "make straight the path for the Lord." Isaiah 40:3 says, "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (NLT) Listening to and responding to God's Voice is more rewarding than you can ever imagine. By setting yourself aside and letting the word of God penetrate your darkness, you will be exposed to a light that reflects a powerful truth. Ask yourself: *what do I really want this Christmas?* Do you want God to answer "yes" to your every request? Or do you desire to accept a God who is sovereign and holy and knows exactly what you need? God commanded Isaiah to announce that one day "new life" will come down from heaven. Those who run with Jesus will be like Jesus. For he has come to give us an eternal future. He has come to restore all of life. He has come to restore me.

**PRAYER** What a gift we have in you Jesus, and as the prayer say's, may I not so much seek to be loved as to love, or seek to be served as to serve. You have taught me well. In Jesus Name, Amen.

### **WEDNESDAY 12/13/23**

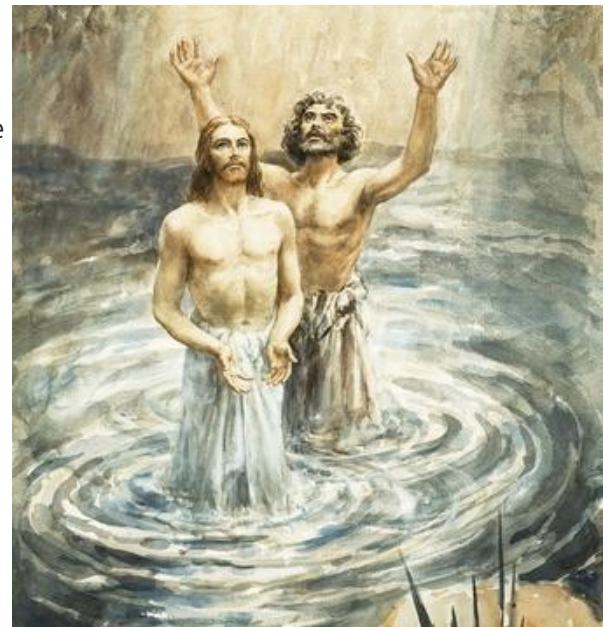
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13// 85:10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Mark 1:1-8// 1:5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

**REFLECTION** John the Baptist was preaching the message of Isaiah to “prepare the way for the Lord “ The message is simple; we must repent of our sins. John’s points to the God of truth who is coming boldly and courageously into our world. The baby Jesus, the Son of God, has overcome the darkness that lurks in the hearts of humankind. God is seeking people to be set free from being captive to our sin. The true accomplishment of Christ’s birth is bringing “new life” to us, This message was first exposed to the people of Judea (vs 5) and now to the people of Otsego. In our church people are coming forward to

repent and confess their sins. They are coming to be baptized. The Voice still calls out to people in need. The Voice breaks into the barren life of people and gives them hope and joy. Jesus opens the ears of the deaf, and opens the eyes of the blind. He graciously invites people to be free who once were captives. The visible wilderness, from which John preached, was an image of a desolate world in which we still live. For God arranged everything in a such a way that the people will be overwhelmed by his grace.

**PRAYER** Thank you Lord for the freedom to see and hear your word. I once was lost and now I’m found. I once was dead, and now I’m alive in you. In Jesus Name, Amen.



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### **THURSDAY 12/14/23**

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13// 85:11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

Mark 1:1-8// 1:6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

**REFLECTION** There was a very unusual man named John the Baptist who lived in the wilderness and his role was to announce the coming of God’s Son into the world. John was born into a long line of priests, on both his mother Elizabeth side, and his father, Zechariah, a priest, was also a member of the priestly order of Abijah. John’s mother Elizabeth was from the priestly line going back to Aaron. Aaron is a central figure in the traditions about the Exodus. At the beginning Aaron was co-equal with Moses, who went to Pharaoh and demanded God’s people to be “set free”. After the Jews marched out of Egypt, Aaron became the high priest and remained in the shadow of his brother Moses. Moses is obviously the leading figure of freeing God’s people. Aaron was then delegated to have the authority to govern all priest’s and priestly matters. So now this John the Baptist is a new different kind of priest. He is the first “evangelist” to announce that Jesus Christ, his biological cousin, is the eternal Son of God. Christ follows God’s plan by choosing to be made known to the whole human race by the testimony of John. God the Father sent John as a witness of Christ’s presence all so that they might be more willing to receive the salvation offered by him. (Please read John 1:6-16)

**PRAYER** Oh Father, we have all been in the wilderness at one time or another. We are so blessed to have you as our North Star to guide and direct us. Thank you Lord. In Jesus Name, Amen.

## **FRIDAY 12/15/23**

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13// 85:12 The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Mark 1:1-8// 1:7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

**REFLECTION** The power of the message John the Baptist is proclaiming is earth shattering. From the first day of this announcement, to this very day, people in every part of the world have taken up the cross of Christ to preach the message of God's plan of restoration. John indicates this is an ever-lasting act, until Christ returns a second time. The voice of John, the message of John will continually reverberate in all the hearts and minds of people. Some will receive it and others will refuse it. John was the first to preach openly, and with great passion about Christ the Savior. As I wrote in Thursday's devotion, God has a very exact plan to restore his creation to its original intent. From the beginning John was a part of God's plan to reveal Christ by making him known in the region of Judea. He did this by asking people to repent of their sins and be baptized as ambassadors carrying forth the fulfillment of God's promises. It is interesting to know John the Baptist was older than Christ by a few months. He therefore becomes the forerunner of Christ in respect of time. "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me", means Christ is far better than John, because he was more excellent. Like John we all need to surrender our life to Christ and be his ambassadors.

**PRAYER** Father God, how can I say thank you enough for what you have done to me! You have provided the sacrificial lamb. You gave birth to your son, And you raised him from the dead, and by your sheer grace. Now you anointed me with your Holy Spirit so I too will have a new eternal life. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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## **SATURDAY 12/16/23**

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13// 85:13 Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

Mark 1:1-8// 1:8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

**REFLECTION** What does this actually mean, being baptized with the Holy Spirit? Clarity can be found in John 1:10 says, "He (Jesus) came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. 11 He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. 12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God." (NLT) I get the part where people reject Jesus. Pagans simply do not accept Jesus as God's creation. The Jewish people still cling to Moses as their savior and strictly follow the Law. Those who accept Jesus as our Savior means that something powerful has happened to us. That something is a rebirth, into a "new life". This is not of the flesh, but "new birth" from the Spirit of God. How do we know we have been given the gift of a new "spiritual birth"? We desire to love God. We desire to live a life honoring him and sharing the Word with those we live. We desire to feed the poor, help heal the sick, and chase the darkness of sin from the world. That is the reason John the Baptist says his baptism with water is a physical representation of a Spirit driven baptism in our lives. When we remember this Advent season that God loves us and saves us, we will be transformed by this great joy.

**PRAYER** Lord Jesus give me wisdom this Christmas season so I too may be seen and heard as one of your ambassadors. In Jesus Name, Amen

