

The Jews had had some preparation already. A long line of prophets had told of "a good time coming," and their glowing predictions were fondly dwelt upon. "Unto which promise," said St. Paul to Agrippa, "our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come." (Acts xxvi. 7.) But to what were they looking forward? To the advent of a mighty conqueror who should drive out the Roman usurpers, restore David's throne, and bring in general prosperity. They had misread the prophecies, and now needed a fresh preparation. So the Baptist is sent; and what is the burden of his message? Denunciation of their sins and solemn calls to repentance. A conqueror should come, indeed, but to destroy the spiritual sway of sin; he should set up his throne, but in the hearts of men; he should bring in happiness, but it would be the happiness of a holy life.

Such was the meaning of John the Baptist's mission; and it teaches us a solemn lesson, namely, that the good news of salvation will have little or no effect upon those who have not first been convinced of their sin and guilt. It is as true now as it was then, that John must come before Jesus—the law before the Gospel. It is he that feels his sin who is ready to welcome a Saviour. The "crooked ways" of our hearts must be "made straight," and the "rough places plain," and thus "a highway for our God be made." A teacher who is accustomed to speak to his scholars individually about their souls knows how often children are perplexed at their own cold-heartedness; they cannot understand why they care so little for Christ, when their own reason tells them how much they ought to care for him. The fact is that they must first be brought to a keener sense of their unworthiness in God's sight. The "beginning of the Gospel" is to know one's need of it.

But John was a herald of the good news also, vers. 7, 8. He had baptized the people as a sign both of God's forgiveness of them, and of their "steadfast purpose to lead a new life." But it was a sign only; it had no inherent power to cleanse or to strengthen; and John goes on to tell of the Coming One as the "Lamb of God which taketh away sin" indeed, (see John i. 29,) and as having a more spiritual baptism, an out-pouring of the Holy Ghost who can indeed renew the heart and the life.

And two other things are in this lesson

brought before us concerning that Coming One, which make the announcement of him all the more "good news."

The first is in vers. 9-13. Here we see Jesus himself—the "beginning" of his ministerial life. And where do we see him? First, in the waters of Jordan, just as if he were himself a sinner needing repentance and forgiveness; secondly, in the wilderness, submitting, like any other child of Adam, to be tempted of the devil. How encouraging is this! Our Deliverer is "in all things made like unto his brethren," was "in all points tempted like as we are," and can, therefore, both sympathize with and succor us. See Heb. ii. 14-18; iv. 15.

The second is in the Golden Text. Our Deliverer is "the Son of God." Not only human to feel for us, but Divine to save us. Look at the verses *just before* this "beginning" of St. Mark, that is, the last three verses of St. Matthew. He is Omnipotent: "All power is given unto me." He is Omnipresent and Eternal: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Seed-Thoughts for Senior Scholars.

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1. What is the meaning of the *beginning of the Gospel*?
2. Who are designated in the second verse by *I, thy, and thee*?
3. Who is meant by the *voice* in verse 3?
4. What was the *preparation* for Christ's coming?
5. Why does St. Mark omit the account of the birth of John and Jesus and several other historical facts?
6. How did John's baptism differ from the Christian baptism?
7. What is meant by *ALL* the land of Judea?
8. Why was John a man of such *rustic* habits?
9. If John was the greatest of men, how could Christ be *mightier*?
10. What is the baptism of the Holy Ghost?
11. What was the import of *Jesus'* baptism?
12. If Christ kept the Jewish *Pasover*, what might we expect of him as to his induction to his appropriate office?
13. How much is implied in the heavenly utterance, *This is my beloved Son*? etc.