

Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent

'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus'

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Many tend to disregard the Gospel of Mark. It is short. It doesn't include our favorite passages. Why read it, when Matthew and John and Luke exist?

But it begins with perhaps the most important verse in the Bible.

'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus.'

We have all heard the word '*Gospel*' said since we were young, whether in church, or whether on a playground, assuring our friends that our allegiance to our promises is 'the Gospel truth.'

Yet few know what the word 'Gospel' means.

Well, it comes from Old English, 'Gos,' meaning our own 'Good,' and 'Spel,' meaning a word. Spel, as in a 'spelling bee.'

This is a direct translation from the biblical Greek, the word *euangelion*, which means, very literally, 'good words.'

This itself is a translation of the Latin phrase, *bona adnuntiatio*, which means 'good news.'

Yet why are Anglo-Saxons translating a Greek word which is a translation of a Roman phrase? Why not just say 'the beginning of the good news from Jesus?'

We look over this too fast. Christmas is coming. Jesus is coming. That is good news! Who is better to have around during Christmas than Jesus!

Jesus lies in the cradle on Christmas day, but this is not what St. Mark cared

about when he declared his Gospel. [In fact, he never mentions the birth of Christ at all]. You see, he was doing something much more dangerous. Much more seditious. He was starting an insurrection.

Before there was a Roman Empire, before there was a Roman Republic, there was the Roman Kingdom; and the first king of this kingdom was Romulus.

There was a great war, or so the Romans believed, between Rome and a people called the Sabines. The Sabines had invaded Rome, and were in the midst of sacking its capital, its highest hill.

All was looking bad for the Romans, until Romulus, the king, prayed to Jupiter, the king of gods, promising that if the heavens gave him the victory that day, that he would establish an Empire without End. That he would abolish despotism and authoritarianism from the earth, and would establish what was, at the time, a new idea, the rule of law.

The battle turned, the Sabines were pushed out of Rome, and victory was won. This victory was called 'the good news.' Not because it was good for the Romans, who won the battle, but because it was the beginning of the bringing of the rule of law to all the earth, just as Romulus had promised.

That was seven hundred years before the coming of Christ. Yet ever since then, the Romans called every conquest of a new land a *bona adnuntatio*, an *euangelion*, a *gospel*, that is, 'good news.' For it was the good news that Rome was fulfilling its promise to the most high god they worshiped that they were bringing justice to all the earth.

Now St. Mark declares '*the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus.*'

For Mark is coronating a new king, a new emperor, the Lord Jesus, with a new Gospel, a new conquest, a new Law, the Law of Christ, as it is called by St. Paul. He is displacing Caesar, who was once called the 'son of the gods,' for the true Son of God has come. As he writes '*Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.*' [He will conquer sin, death, and this unbelieving world, as well as its prince, and establish a new kingdom.]

'And his kingdom will have no end.'

Jesus will not conquer with armies with swords, but martyrs with suffering. He

will not speak threats, but words of forgiveness. He will not lord over those He vanquished with pride, but in humility offer Himself to them with His own body and blood. He, too, has a promise to fulfill: that *'he will gather the lambs in his arms.'* And his word is truth.

This is the Gospel, the *euangelion*, the *bona adnuntiatio*, That the true king has come. You will see Him soon as but a child, but in the end of days you will see Him as God [of all creation.]

Isaiah declares: *'Behold your God.'*

But John the Baptist says simply: *'Prepare the way of the Lord.'* For He is indeed coming, with forgiveness in His wings, as it is written:

'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-11; Matthew 11:2-15.