

**“Mark: A Concealed Conception”**  
**by Rev. David J. Wood**  
**1st Sunday of Advent: November 30, 2025**  
**First Congregational Church**  
**Camden, Maine**

Before I read today’s reading from Mark, permit me a brief introduction.

Over the four weeks of ADVENT We will be taking Christmas one Gospel at a time. This week, Mark, to be followed by Matthew, Luke and finally John...They tell us pretty much all we know about Jesus...closest we have to a biography...

Mark is almost universally considered the earliest Gospel...so it seems right that we begin with MARK.

Even though the earliest, not until around the year 70...some 30 years after Jesus walked the earth. Math & Luke used Mark as the backbone of their narratives...None of them started from scratch...stories and accounts circulated by word and in written texts...

Specific to our focus in this Advent Season is to see how they begin their accounts...

Matthew & Luke....are very similar in that they begin by giving us an account of where Jesus came from, how he came to be....

From Matthew & Luke, we get all the material we recognize as the Christmas Story...all the characters and events: Mary & Joseph, the journey to Bethlehem, the Angel Gabriel visiting Mary, the shepherds, Angelic Choirs...the Star and the wise men...indeed the entire Manger Scene. The Gospel of John has a unique take on Jesus’s beginnings – but that’s for another sermon.

Today our focus is on the Gospel of Mark... Let’s see how he begins the story of Jesus....

**Mark 1: 1-15**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,’”

So John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted[g] by Satan.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

### **Mark 8: 27-30**

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him."

~~~~~

"Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the River Jordan." That's the amount of detail Mark gives us about where Jesus came from. After Jesus is baptized, he is driven into the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil, delivers his first sermon, and recruits his first Disciples...all in the first 20 verses!

Can you imagine....if...this Christmas Eve, instead of reading as we normally do, the opening verses from Matthew, Luke, and John, I decided to use only the opening verses from Mark.

Folks would go home scratching their heads and vow that they will go searching for a different Christmas Eve service next year where they actually use the Bible!

Christmas, the story of the Incarnation, of God taking on our flesh, the fullness of the human condition, becoming one of us is not up front in Mark...it is well, more concealed...it is a secret...it's more of a mystery...it unfolds ever so gradually and with much difficulty and misunderstanding.

Mark doesn't put Christmas up front...He's not alone...took until the 5th Century for the Pope to declare Christmas as a Holy Day...called the Feast of the Nativity. Then there was the Puritans cancelled Christmas altogether in the 1600's. Christmas didn't become a Federal holiday here in the USA until the 1870's....

Well, I think Mark might have had a lot of sympathy for the downplaying of Christmas...probably aware of those stories...but he chose to not include them....

Not only do we not get the stories of the HOLY FAMILY...but the stories in Mark about Jesus and his family are far from HOLY...they feel, well...like a very human family....

For instance...in Mark 3...Mary and his brothers enter the scene...Jesus has come home and he has brought his entourage with him who are clamoring for his attention and power....Jesus mother and siblings have come restrain him...he's become an embarrassment of sorts...stirring up controversy....they can't get to him, so they send word that they would like to have a word with him...

In response, he asks, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Then, gesturing to those in the room, "YOU ARE...who do the will of God!"

In another place later, chapter 6, Jesus has Come home again to teach and heal.....skepticism abounds: Jesus make the observation that, "A prophet is treated with honor EXCEPT in their hometown..and among their own kin and in their own house."

There is a common thread that runs through Mark's Gospel....Jesus true identity is largely concealed...a secret. No one seems to get who Jesus is...

not his family

Not the religious leaders of his day

not the political authorities

even his disciples coming to terms with who he is

There is a moment at the very center of Mark's gospel when Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They tell him all the different opinions folks have...none of which are the at he is the Messiah.

Then Jesus asks them directly: "WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

Peter steps up and says boldly, "You are the Messiah!"

He immediately orders them to tell no one...swears them to secrecy.

Jesus then goes on to define what it means that he is indeed the Messiah:

That he must suffer, be rejected, and put to death and after 3 days rise again."

All this talk of suffering and death, is too much for Peter and he takes Jesus aside to inform him that being a Messiah does not involve suffering and death.

Eventually, FOR THE REST OF THE BOOK OF MARK, Mark narrates in great detail how Jesus is eventually betrayed, denied, and deserted by all his followers.....

Now, there is a moment in Mark, towards the very end, when Jesus identity is revealed emphatically, unabmiguously, and publically.

It comes, finally, in Chapter 15...the 2nd to last chapter in Mark's Gospel.

There is a Roman soldier...standing at the foot of the cross on what we call Good Friday...he is observing the horrific events unfold and he hears Jesus cry out from the cross in agony, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and then, as darkness settled over the whole scene, he sees Jesus take his last breath.

Observing all this, the Centurion declares,  
"Truly this man was God's Son!"

The true identity of Jesus is finally and fully revealed..not in the silent holy night illuminated by bright stars or angelic choruses or visiting shepherds or Wise men...but it is the darkness of suffering and death that Jesus true identity comes to light.

A few verses later, the disciples discovery of the empty tomb...he writes simply, "they fled from the tomb in terror and amazement seized them and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Before they flee in fear and terror...they are told that Jesus has gone on ahead of them and is waiting for them in Gallilee....

Jesus is the one who waits for us...who beckons us onward into the future that is our lives...a place where we can begin again...

It is worth noting that Mark wrote for those who were in the midst of a tragic and chaotic time...

Written in 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans...unparalleled destruction and tragedy...where is Jesus in all this? Mark tells the story of Jesus as the story of God with us In the midst of it...hope is not lost...with such a Messiah it can never be...

From Mark's point of view, the right question is not  
WHAT IS THE WORLD COMING TO?

The right question is,  
WHO HAS COME TO THE WORLD?

For Mark, Jesus is for those whose present feels precarious, for those who deeply the confusion and chaos of this world..its inequity and injustice....God is with us...God is waiting to be revealed in our darkest nights of this life...there God is to be known and found...and it is there we are to find the courage to take the risk of hope!

To remember this story is to remember that we belong to a God who will not let us go...not now, not then, not ever... Amen. Thanks be to God.