

When I was young I used to go to a lot of concerts at places like The Original Electric Factory, the Tower Theater, The Second Fret and the Spectrum, which is about to be torn down. Back then there was usually a headline act and then one or two opening acts. These were either bands on the way up, or in some cases on the way down.

The purpose of the opening act was to whet your appetite for the main attraction. Sometimes the opening act out shined the main act, but that was rare.

Today in our Gospel lesson we read about another opening Act – John the Baptist, or as I prefer to call him, John the Baptizer – because we know that he was not a Baptist! Turn with me to our Gospel lesson from Mark 1, and we will see the one who prepared the way, for the main attraction – the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of what we know as the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Synoptic Gospels – which means “same eyes” cover basically the same thing, from the different perspectives of the writers. They cover the bulk of the three years of our Savior’s ministry. The Gospel of John spends about half of the time on just the last week of our Savior’s life – so there is a different emphasis and they really compliment one another.

We don’t know a lot about Mark. It is believed that he is the John Mark that we read about in Acts 12. He was not one of the Apostles as was Matthew and John, but then Luke was not an Apostle either. They were all simply witnesses to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

As we consider the Gospel of Mark, we see first of all, what it is all about – Mark 1:1 (READ). Notice what he says: Mark 1:1: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*”

Two things must be clearly noticed here – what he is about to write is “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ*” – the Gospel meaning simply “good news” – and it is good news that Jesus Christ came to bring salvation to all who would believe in him. But, as we shall see, it is John the Baptizer who begins to tell the people who Jesus is and what he would do.

We also see something very important here in verse 1 – “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” ... *the Son of God.* In Mark, we do not read about the conception or birth of our Savior – he appears on the scene as an adult, as we shall see. But in these words *the Son of God* we see his divine origin. We see that he is no ordinary person.

As one commentator says: “This title was used here to attract attention, and secure the respect of those who should read the gospel. It is no common history. It does not recount

the deeds of man — of a hero or a philosopher — but the doctrines and doings of the Son of God. The history, therefore, “commands” respect.”

As Mark continues, he then introduces us to the opening act – John the Baptizer. Now, this John was not just someone who happened on the scene – he was one who was prophesied in the Old Testament to proclaim the beginnings of the Savior’s ministry, as we read in Mark 1:2,3 (READ).

The two passages here are quoted from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Malachi 3:1 says in full: “*Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,*” Says the Lord of hosts.”

And Isaiah 40:3 says: “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.”*”

This shows that our Savior’s coming with all that he did should not have been a surprise to the people of Israel – and neither should the coming of John the Baptizer. John was the opening act for Savior who would soon follow.

And his coming and ministry was announced to his father, Zacharias. We read these words in Luke 1:5-17 about the birth of John: “*There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*”

The ministry of John the Baptizer was ordained from before his conception in the womb of Elizabeth – and so again – *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* The opening act.

And this is exactly what we see in the next verses in our Gospel lesson – Mark 1:4-5 (READ). In these verses we see a number of things that are important for us. First, John was preaching a baptism of repentance. In Matthew 3:1-2 we read: *“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”* Luke and later on in Mark, they call it *“the kingdom of God”* – the important thing being that it marked the long awaited arrival of the Savior.

John was the last of the Old Testament Prophets, we see this in what we read in Mark 1:6 (READ). This is exactly what Elijah wore, as you can read in 2 Kings 1:8. Considering what he ate, imagine inviting him to a church covered dish supper? Oh, what do you have – just locusts and wild honey.

Anyway, as the last of the Old Testament prophets he was probably sprinkling people with hyssop, that is why I call him John the Baptizer. In the Old Testament we read that the utensils in the Temple were sprinkled with hyssop, as it was dipped in the blood of the sacrifices. We also can infer from the number of people that came to him, that it would have been impossible for John to dunk them all, as our Baptist brethren would have us believe.

But we see John’s importance as the opening act in the next verses – Mark 1:7-8 (READ). John knew exactly who he was, what he was to do and what Jesus would do. He recognized that Jesus was greater than him – and that he was simply preparing the way for him and his ministry.

Jesus knew that John the Baptizer was great – but he knew also the place of John in the order of things. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:11: *“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*

Again, though, John knew who he was and what he came to do, he initially refused to baptize Jesus as we read in Matthew 3:13-15: *“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.”*

And as we read in the Gospel of John – remember that I said they compliment one another – we read this: John 1:29-31: *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.”*

John knew who he was and what he was commissioned to do. He also knew who Jesus was and what he came to do – Jesus was *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

This is what we see as John baptized Jesus – Mark 1:9-11 (READ). Think about this for a moment. John was the opening act ... the one preparing the way for the main event ... the main act – and as he did what he was supposed to do we hear the voice from heaven – “*You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*”

We go back to verse 1 of the Gospel according to St. Mark – “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* And that my friends is what the opening act is all about. An introduction to the one and only Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

So, let us be thankful for the opening act. It heralded the coming of *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*