



# Advent #2

## Stand right, God is patient

w/c 10 December 2023

*"True Godliness does not turn men (sic) out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavour to mend it." (William Penn)*

### Read Mark 1:1–8

To begin, can you think back to the early days of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I – say about 1563. A long time ago isn't it? Shakespeare is not quite ten years old; the Spanish Armada is still 25 years away. That though is the gap between the last writings in the Old Testament – the final prophet, Malachi – and the start of John the Baptist's ministry. Zechariah's prophecy after his birth. *"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High"* (Luke 1:76) must then have seemed shocking.

Jesus didn't just call John a prophet, he described him as being greater than anyone who had gone before him (Matthew 11:11). Given the breadth and depth of the Old Testament writings why do think Jesus said that? In what ways is John's model of ministry relevant for us today, or has Pentecost rendered it redundant?

Mark brings in two major concepts in just his first two verses: *Messiah* and *Messenger*. Ideas that would have triggered all sorts of biblical responses in the mind of a first-century Jew. Some translations use Christ rather than Messiah in verse one but the meaning is identical; Messiah comes from Hebrew, Christ from the Greek. The Jewish vision of a coming Messiah, though clear, was multi-faceted – for example, God, King, Priest and Servant. See Isaiah 40:9; Zechariah 9:9; Zechariah 6:12–13 and Isaiah 42:1–4. Messiah though simply means *one who has been anointed*. Jesus was anointed though perhaps not in the way expected for a Messiah (Mark 14:3) – but also in a more fundamental sense – see Luke 4:18. It is though not just a Messianic sign: the kings of Israel were also anointed. Paul (2 Corinthians 1:21) describes us even as having been anointed by Jesus. Given its huge historical resonance how do we live up to that?

And then we have *messenger* – in one sense it's a once-off thing relating to John; but equally something for us today. It's relevant to take a quick look at the original (Greek) terms used by the New Testament writers in this context. In verse two, Mark writes *angelos*, the same, common, term for a messenger that Luke would use when describing the appearance of an angel to Mary or to the shepherds in his narrative. There is another word that is rendered as "messenger" in our bibles - *apostolos* - (for example, John 13:16). It is, essentially, someone sent (to someone) for a purpose, hence our modern term apostle. The Latin *missio* (hence missionary) also relates to one who has been sent. How might we step outside our church-bubble and take our (God's) message to those we encounter every day?

### Read 2 Peter 3:8–15a

The biblical writers – while noting the deep future – keep bringing us back to our lives in the here and now. Our purpose is, as Peter says, to *"live holy and godly lives"*. I was struck by the one translation of Philippians 3:20 which describes us as being: *"...a colony of heaven..."* What would we need to do/be to achieve that? How do we ensure that the focus of our Christian life is on others, rather than ourselves or the church?

Do you feel that Peter thought that the events he describes would happen in the lifetime of his first readers? If so, does it matter that we're all still here? How far should we be concerned with events whose timing is (as Jesus himself said) unknown rather than focusing on what will be the state of the church in 2033 or 2043 – or even 3023? The latter may seem impossibly far in the future but as Peter's words here remind us, is in another sense only tomorrow.