

## Jesus the Messiah

The Gospel of Mark begins with a simple statement of introduction. This is the NIV version of Mark 1:1:

*The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

Now, let me read the same verse from the New Living:

*Here begins the good news about Jesus the Messiah the Son of God.*

Gospel = “good news”. Christ = “messiah”

In fact, the Greek *χριστος* is the translation of the Hebrew *mashiach*. It means “anointed one”. It means “messiah”.

So when you read the words “Jesus Christ” in your New Testament, you’re not reading Jesus’ first and last names, you’re reading His name and His title: Jesus Messiah, Jesus the Anointed One, Jesus the promised Redeemer of God’s people.

Notice that, right from the start, Jesus’ story is one of good news. Jesus came to a people who were in desperate straits, who were uncomfortably squirming under the thumb of Roman rule. The Romans were notorious for living off the people in the countries they occupied. Locals were expected, not only to feed their own families, but, even before that, to meet the needs of the legions of Romans soldiers who were occupying the land. That’s probably why there was a large herd of pigs on the east side of Galilee where Jesus healed the Gadarene demoniac: they were there to supply the Romans with bacon, certainly not to feed the Jews who were not permitted to eat pork. Taxation was oppressive, but was enforced, even if a father had to sell a family member into slavery to pay the expected amount. It was a harsh time, a cruel world, and the people were desperate for a redeemer to liberate them. The messianic hope was alive and well, fed by the prophets of old, by the heightened expectations of the period between the Old and New Testaments and by the brief period of self-government they had enjoyed under the Maccabean clan.

Into this desperation, the Messiah came, announced by angels to a group of shepherds on a hillside outside the town of Bethlehem:

*“Don’t be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior -- yes, the Messiah, the Lord -- has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!” (Luke 2:10-12)*

So, here’s the news in a nutshell:

1. It’s good news, or gospel, and it will bring great joy.
2. It’s for all people! This is not an announcement for Jews only, but for people in all parts of the world. It is not an announcement that has been reserved for the religious or political leaders, because it is being made to despised shepherds.
3. It’s not an announcement that should be greeted with apathy or indifference because it is being made by a great company of angels who are bringing news from heaven itself.
4. This is an announcement of the fulfilment of prophecy. Notice the reference to

Bethlehem as “the city of David”. The Savior, yes the Messiah, the one promised from before the time of King David, has now been born in his town. So when you sing, as we did a couple of weeks back, “Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day”, we’re remembering that the promised Messiah has come.

5. The good news comes in a small package. Yes, the Messiah has come, but he has arrived, not as a grown up adult, but as an infant in a manger, wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a feeding trough for animals. You and I know that, when times are desperate, we want an answer now, we want relief now, but help, even though it was on the way, would not be there for a generation. And when help came, would people really receive it?

And yet, here is the power of faith, whether in shepherds or magi from the east, and the power of the Jewish hope for Messiah .... they came and saw the child. Inspired by the appearance of angels on a hillside outside Bethlehem or by the appearance of a strange new star in the eastern sky, they came to see what God had done. I wondered to myself if I would have gone into Bethlehem to see a baby in a manger, or if I would have thought, “What good’s a baby going to do for us now?”

When you read the word “Christ” in the New Testament, you have to think “Messiah”, because that’s what it meant to those who first read it. For example, read the opening pages of Matthew this way. Here’s chapter 1, vv. 17, 18:

*There were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. This is how the birth of Jesus Messiah came about; His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.*

In the next chapter, when the magi visit Jerusalem on their search for the baby born to be king, they have an interview with King Herod who is suspicious of any rival to his throne or to his family’s right to rule. And he asks the chief priests and teachers of the law, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” And they answer, “In Bethlehem, in Judea.”

In Luke, as Jesus was early in His public ministry, we read about Him healing and bringing deliverance to people:

*When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying His hands on each one, He healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Messiah. (4:40,41)*

If you’re a first-century reader, you’re thinking, “Angels declared that Messiah had come, Matthew shows us the line of descent from Abraham and David, Herod was told where the Messiah was to be born and it’s where Jesus was born, and even the demons were declaring that He was the Son of God and the promised Messiah.” All of that hope and expectation that we have seen being built up in Israel over hundreds of years was now being fulfilled? This is God’s time? Jesus is Messiah? So many

indicators are pointing in that direction and your hope is getting stronger.

One of the high points of the gospels is the event recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and it began with Jesus asking His disciples a question: 'who do people say I am?' And they replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and others think that one of the prophets from long ago has come back." "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" And Peter has the answer, "The Messiah of God!" In saying that, Peter is expressing his belief that Jesus is the fulfilment of the expectations from the past thousand years since the reign of King David. He is saying, "I believe that you are the king who was to come from the line of David, the Branch who would rule in justice and bring about peace, the promised leader who would bring us into the season of Jubilee." Peter wasn't just throwing words around; his declaration is specific and declares that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

We've seen in previous weeks that the expectation was "out there", that people were talking about Messiah's coming. We know as well that the expectation was so vivid in people's minds that several men were able to take advantage of that expectation during the first and second centuries and lead revolts against Roman rule, revolts that ended up costing many their lives and many more their well-being and hopes for the future. Some even wondered if John the Baptist might be the Messiah. This exchange comes in the first chapter of John's gospel:

*The Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him (John) who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."*  
(John 1:19,20)

As you work your way through John's gospel, you see a tension developing: is Jesus the Messiah or not? The people seem to think He might be, starting with the woman at the well of Sychar in Samaria whom Jesus talked with:

*Leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"* (John 4:28,29)

*At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Here He is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to Him. Have the authorities really concluded that He is the Messiah?"*  
(7:25,26)

*Many in the crowd put their faith in Him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"* (7:31)

On the other hand, there were some doubters, led by the chief priests and teachers of the law. In the same chapter in which Martha declared to Jesus her faith that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, they plotted together to kill Him.

After Jesus had risen from the dead, and had the famous encounter with Thomas, John ends chapter 20 with these words:

*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in*

*His name. (30,31)*

That's the purpose and the invitation of the gospel writers. They have told Jesus' story so that we would believe in Him. They have presented to us the evidence for Jesus being the Messiah of God's people and they ask us to respond in faith.

Let's move on to the book of Acts where a majority of the references to Jesus as Messiah come in public preaching. An early example comes from Peter's first sermon in chapter 2 where the word Christ appears three times.

1. After quoting David's Psalm 16, Peter explains what David was talking about:  
*Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. (Acts 2:31)*
2. Then the high point in the sermon, the declaration of Jesus' lordship, His kingship:  
*Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, who you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. (v. 36)*
3. And after the people respond with conviction, this:  
*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Messiah, for the forgiveness of your sins. (2:38)*

In chapter 4, Peter and John are called to account by the religious leaders for preaching the resurrection of Jesus, backed up by healing a crippled beggar at one of the temple gates. The authorities asked Peter and John, "By what power or what name did you do this?" Peter speaks:

*Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Messiah of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. (Acts 4:8-10)*

In that simple proclamation, Peter is telling the religious leaders of the Jews that their Messiah has come, that they are responsible for His murder, that He rose from the dead and that people can be healed in His name. They, of course, rejected the idea because it was too threatening to their current status as the power brokers between Judea and Rome and because they had just executed this man who they considered a trouble maker. They were amazed, because Peter and John were uneducated Galileans, not the type you would expect courage and eloquence from, but they weren't ready to become followers of Jesus.

As for the disciples, even as opposition intensified and the religious leaders debated whether or not to kill them, they continued to tell the Jewish world that Messiah had come:

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. (4:42)*

We've seen the expectations that were being raised in the Psalms and Prophets of the Old Testament and we can also see that not everyone believed, or believes today,

that the Messiah has come. Let's take a look now at how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies.

1. The Messiah would be a descendant of David. Both the gospels of Matthew and Luke contain genealogies that point to Jesus being born in the line of David. He was addressed as the son of David by two blind men, by a non-Jewish woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon and by crowds of people who greeted Him as He rode up to Jerusalem. And do you remember when Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of David"? In the last chapter of the Bible, in Revelation 22:16, calls Himself "the Root and the Offspring of David and the bright Morning Star."

2. He would be born in Bethlehem. When Herod asked the chief priests and teachers of the law where the Messiah would be born, they told him it would be in Bethlehem. And they quoted the prophet Micah who said, "Out of you, Bethlehem, will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel." Jesus' parents lived in Nazareth, up in Galilee, but when Mary was reaching full term in her pregnancy, the Roman census forced her and Joseph to make a journey to his ancestral home, the town of David, Bethlehem.

3. The Messiah would be anointed by God's Holy Spirit for a unique ministry. We read how the Spirit came on Jesus in the form of a dove after He had been baptized by John in the Jordan River. (Matt.3:16) And the Gospels tell us that He was led by the Spirit, first to be tempted by Satan, and then into His public ministry.

4. The Messiah would represent God's Kingdom and would demonstrate God's compassion for His people. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus began His public ministry by announcing this:

*The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.* (Mark 1:14)

Jesus' life was marked by compassion towards those who were in distress. A great summary statement for the way Jesus responded to people is found in Matthew 9:36:

*When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

5. The Messiah would be a ruler, who would govern the people in righteousness and justice. This is where many have rejected Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews. They see Him as a failed revolutionary, an activist who was put to death by the Empire and who was never established as the ruler of Israel. They assume that the references to a Messiah who would sit on David's throne point to a ruler in the political sense, someone with the power, with the authority, to establish justice in the land. And yet, when on trial for His life, Jesus accepted the title of king. In answering Pilate, He said:

*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is from another place.* (John 18:36)

And when Pilate sent Jesus out to be crucified, he ordered that an inscription be nailed to His cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (John 19:19) A different kind of king than what we might expect, but a king who is described in 1 Timothy and in Revelation as "King of kings and Lord of lords." (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16)

6. The Messiah would bring peace, not just to the Jews, but a peace that would spread throughout the whole world. This is the major stumbling block for skeptics in Jesus as Messiah today. Where's the peace? Why does the world always hang under the threat of war if the prince of peace has really come? But the peace that Jesus brought to earth was not imposed from above, but offered within. Even we who believe are not forced to live in peace with others, but, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to live at peace, to forgive those who have wronged us and to set aside our differences. And reconciliation and mediation of differences is taking place around the world today because of the initiative of followers of Jesus who see themselves as peacemakers. That's true on a whole range of levels and is a powerful force for good in our world.

7. The Messiah would suffer; the Messiah would be "cut off" and die. I mentioned a couple of weeks back how I found it impacting that so many Jews whose testimonies of coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah are online, were struck by reading Isaiah 53, the description of the suffering servant, and whose reaction was, "That's Jesus. That's in my Bible and it is clearly a description of Jesus' suffering and death."

8. The Messiah would conduct his ministry and suffer for it in the years before the destruction of the temple. Daniel 9 gave the number of years that would pass between an order to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and the time of the Messiah. (v.25) Jesus' life fits into that time frame. Daniel 9 also tells us that, fairly soon after the Messiah is killed, the city and the sanctuary, or temple, will be destroyed. (v. 26) Jesus was crucified in, or close to, the year 30 A.D. Jerusalem was overthrown and the temple torn down in the year 70 A.D.

It doesn't look like everything people expected, but God's workings seldom fit our preconceived ideas. What Jesus did, in His coming, in His life and ministry, in His suffering and death and in His resurrection, was fulfill the many Old Testament prophecies of what the Messiah would be and what the Messiah would do. Looking back, we can see how Jesus fulfilled prophecy and also how some would find reason to reject Him. But the beauty is that we are assured again that God's Word is true and faithful. We can be confident that He speaks to us through that Word today and we can be at peace in the midst of a hostile and confusing world because Messiah has come and has brought us His peace.

Let me leave you today with a verse from Ephesians:

*For Jesus Himself is our peace ... He came and preached peace to you who were far away and to those who were near. (Eph. 2:14, 17)*

He has broken down the barrier between Gentile and Jew - that's the subject of this passage - and made a way for all people to be truly the people of God.