

Week 1: Nov 29th to Dec 5th. Mark 13:24-37 The Message Version

Read: ²⁴⁻²⁵ “Following those hard times,

Sun will fade out,

moon cloud over,

Stars fall out of the sky,

cosmic powers tremble.

²⁶⁻²⁷ “And then they’ll see the Son of Man enter in grand style, his Arrival filling the sky—no one will miss it! He’ll dispatch the angels; they will pull in the chosen from the four winds, from pole to pole.

²⁸⁻³¹ “Take a lesson from the fig tree. From the moment you notice its buds form, the merest hint of green, you know summer’s just around the corner. And so it is with you. When you see all these things, you know he is at the door. Don’t take this lightly. I’m not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one, too—these things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out; my words won’t wear out.

³²⁻³⁷ “But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven’s angels, not even the Son. Only the Father. So keep a sharp lookout, for you don’t know the timetable. It’s like a man who takes a trip, leaving home and putting his servants in charge, each assigned a task, and commanding the gatekeeper to stand watch. So, stay at your post, watching. You have no idea when the homeowner is returning, whether evening, midnight, cockcrow, or morning. You don’t want him showing up unannounced, with you asleep on the job. I say it to you, and I’m saying it to all: Stay at your post. Keep watch.”

Reflect: If you have raised a family, I wonder how many times you shouted up the stairs “are you ready yet?” Cajoling children to get their school bags and shoes on, and grab their packed lunches. No matter how prepared I thought they were, there was always something last minute which needed to be done.

We need to be ready for Jesus’ return. We do not know when that will happen but we do know He has promised to come back to redeem the world and fully establish God’s Kingdom. We wait eagerly for this time, but also reminded that the message of the hope that Jesus offers still needs to be shared with others. We all have a part to play in this work. Who can you share Jesus with today?

Pray: Lord Jesus, please help me to be ready for your return. When I am timid to say your name to others, please give me your boldness. Amen.

Week 2: Dec 6th to 12th. Mark 1v1-8 The Message Version

Read: John the Baptist

I ¹⁻³ The good news of Jesus Christ—the Message! - begins here, following to the letter the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Watch closely: I'm sending my preacher ahead of you;
He'll make the road smooth for you.
Thunder in the desert!
Prepare for God's arrival!
Make the road smooth and straight!

⁴⁻⁶ John the Baptist appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.

⁷⁻⁸ As he preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out."

Reflect: Were you ever in a play yourself? Did you have a starring role or were you one of the extras? I always seemed to be cast in the role of narrator in school plays when I so wanted to be an angel or a shepherd. It took me many years to understand that actually the narrator had an important part too, to tell the story of what others were seeing. And so it was with this strange man called John the Baptist. He was the narrator for the person everyone was waiting to see; Jesus. He knew that he needed to fade into the background of the story and allow Jesus to be highlighted. John had a part to play but it was not to be centre stage. That spot was only fulfilled in Jesus, who was unassuming and yet carried His presence in a way that attracted the crowds and also the individuals.

Are you able to stand to one side and allow others to see Jesus through your words and your work and your acts of kindness?

Pray: Lord Jesus, please help me to step aside and not need to be centre of attention. Thank you for the promise that in your Kingdom, the least shall be the greatest and the greatest the least. Please help me to accept this upside-down way of thinking, and to always put you first. Amen.

Week 3: Dec 13th to 19th. John 1v6-8, 19-28 The Message Version

Read: ⁶⁻⁸ There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.

Thunder in the Desert ¹⁹⁻²⁰ When Jews from Jerusalem sent a group of priests and officials to ask John who he was, he was completely honest. He didn't evade the question. He told the plain truth: "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ They pressed him, "Who, then? Elijah?"

"I am not."

"The Prophet?"

"No."

²² Exasperated, they said, "Who, then? We need an answer for those who sent us. Tell us something—anything! —about yourself."

²³ "I'm thunder in the desert: 'Make the road straight for God!' I'm doing what the prophet Isaiah preached."

²⁴⁻²⁵ Those sent to question him were from the Pharisee party. Now they had a question of their own: "If you're neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet, why do you baptise?"

²⁶⁻²⁷ John answered, "I only baptise using water. A person you don't recognise has taken his stand in your midst. He comes after me, but he is not in second place to me. I'm not even worthy to hold his coat for him."

²⁸ These conversations took place in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising at the time.

Reflect: Our world prefers to congratulate those who come first, the winners, the leaders of society in different fields. We are trained to always seek to be the best and to win at all costs. If some people are left in our wake, then they must be weak.

This is NOT the message from Jesus. He turned things upside-down in being the most humble of men, and yet able to speak with authority to the religious and political leaders of the day. He cared for the marginalised and poor. He went to places that were not considered suitable for a teacher and shared the food and company with those that no-one else would even be seen with. He allowed women to be among his followers and to learn from him. He healed people with disabilities and loved them unconditionally.

Pray: Lord Jesus, please help me to see people as you see them and to love them too. When I feel superior to others, please help me to be humble like you are and remove that feeling. Make me tender and compassionate to all I meet. Amen.

Week 4: Dec 20th to 26th. Luke 1v26-38 The Message Version

Read: A Virgin Conceives ²⁶⁻²⁸ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:
Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you.

²⁹⁻³³ She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.' The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will rule Jacob's house forever— no end, ever, to his kingdom."

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."

³⁵ The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; Therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God.

³⁶⁻³⁸ "And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."

And Mary said, Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say.

Then the angel left her.

Reflect: Can you remember getting some momentous news and being told you were not allowed to mention it to anyone just yet? The feeling bursting out of you that you were desperate to share this news with someone, but you knew you mustn't?

I wonder if this is what Mary was feeling when she was told that she was going to be the mother of the son of God Himself. And despite the difficulties her pregnancy would cause, because she was pure, she could not pass the baby off as her fiancé's. In that culture, at that time, this news was momentous. Mary, however, says "let it be with me just as you say." She did not bargain, or set her own conditions but meekly accepts that God knew what He was doing in asking her to fulfill this role.

Pray: Lord Jesus, please help me to hear your voice and to do what you ask of me, no matter what the cost. Please let me be willing to obey you and know you love me without reservation. Remind me when I doubt that nothing is impossible with God.
Amen