

Mark 1:1-20

The gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God began with words from Isaiah the prophet. Like Malachi, another prophet of old, Isaiah foretold that John would come to prepare the way for the Lord. John, the baptiser, appeared in the desert calling the people out to him. He called God's people to prepare, to get ready to repent and to be baptised. Many from Judea came to him. In his camel-hair clothes, John told them to expect another, someone after him, someone more powerful than he. They were to be prepared for the Lord's arrival.

Jesus came from Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan River. The heavens were ripped open, the Holy Spirit came down into Jesus, and God his Father spoke. Jesus, he said, was his beloved, his delightful, son. But the Spirit drove Jesus out for testing in the wilderness. For forty days, tempted by Satan, he was among the wild animals. And then he came back into Galilee.

There, at last, Jesus spoke, declaring that God's kingdom was coming, that it was drawing near. People were to prepare, to get ready. Repent, believe the gospel good news. The time is ready – the kingdom of God is near!

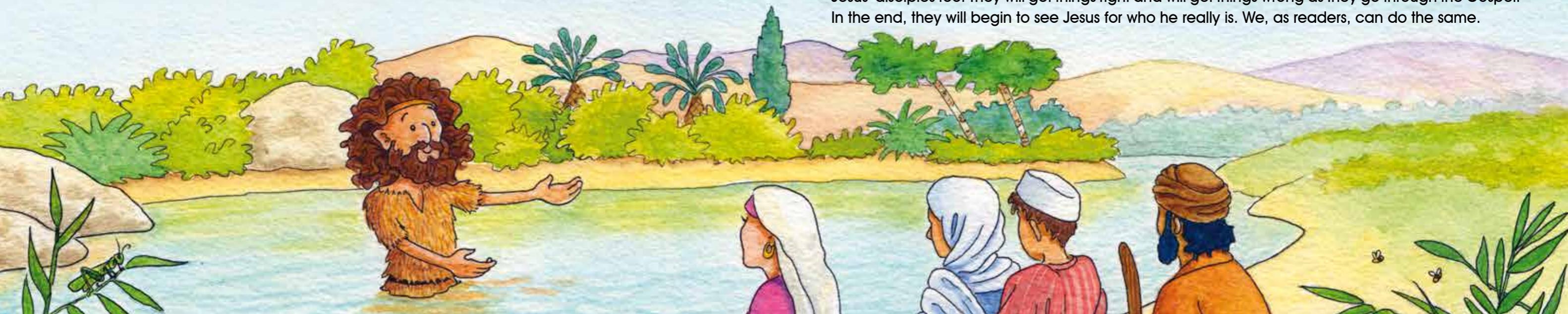
And so Jesus began choosing disciples: friends, followers, people who would learn from him to live as he said. Four of them were fishermen, called to catch people for him. And so Peter and Andrew, James and John left their nets and followed him. The kingdom of God was near.

PRAYER: Here is a prayer help you as you read Mark. 'God in heaven, please speak to me through Mark's Gospel. Please help me to read carefully, and to see Jesus for who he really is. Please help me to follow Jesus, both in the pages of Mark and in the different stages of my life. For Jesus' sake, Amen.'

THE GOSPEL BEGAN: Mark starts by talking about the 'gospel', the good news about Jesus. And Mark will never talk about anything else! Right to the end of his Gospel, he is telling the good news about Jesus, God's Son. But only once in a while, like when he reports Jesus' baptism, will Mark tell us directly who Jesus is. Often he keeps this a little bit hidden, to keep us reading, to keep us thinking, to keep us wanting to find out more. And Mark's 'good news' begins before Jesus – with John the baptiser, and (even earlier) with the Old Testament prophets who spoke of Jesus' coming. Both parts of the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament, tell us the good news about Jesus.

IN THE DESERT: In the Old Testament, God led his people in the desert, he fed his people there. He made promises to them, and he gave them his law there. When God let his people go into exile, he promised that he would make a way back for them, through the desert. Through his prophets, God promised that someone would come who would announce that the Lord himself was coming to his people. And so, in Mark 1, John is there, announcing that the Lord is about to come. John baptised people, as a sign that they were getting ready. Jesus comes to the desert, is baptised, and is himself tempted by Satan there. It is out of the desert that Mark's good news appears.

DISCIPLES: In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' disciples learned from him as they followed him. We can become Jesus' disciples too. They will get things right and will get things wrong as they go through the Gospel. In the end, they will begin to see Jesus for who he really is. We, as readers, can do the same.



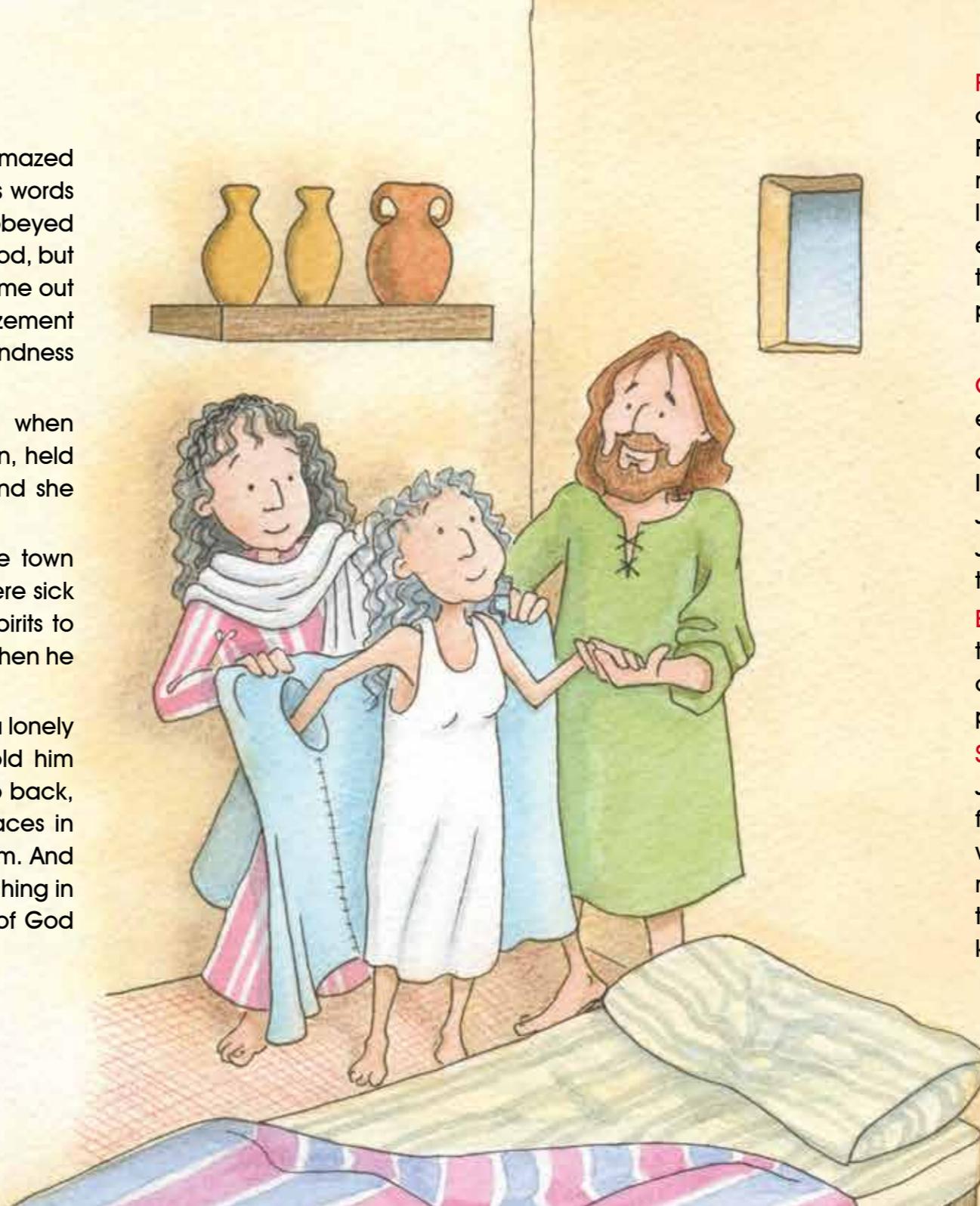
Mark 1:21-39

In Galilee, in the town of Capernaum, people were amazed at what Jesus taught them. They could hear that his words had power. To their astonishment, even evil spirits obeyed his orders. The spirits knew that Jesus had come from God, but they could not resist Jesus' command. Quietly, they came out of people and stopped harming them. So, to the amazement of those watching, Jesus used his power to show kindness to people.

One day, Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed when Jesus came to her house in Capernaum. Jesus went in, held her hand, and helped her up. The illness left her, and she welcomed Jesus into her home.

That evening, after the sun went down, the whole town gathered at that house. People brought those who were sick to Jesus. He healed them all. He also ordered evil spirits to stop harming people. The spirits obeyed Jesus, even when he told them not to shout out about who he was.

The next morning, before sunrise, Jesus went out to a lonely place, and prayed. His disciples found him, and told him that everyone was looking for him. But Jesus didn't go back, as they suggested. Instead, he went on to other places in Galilee. That, he said, was why he had left Capernaum. And so he travelled around to other towns in Galilee, preaching in synagogues, and driving out demons. The kingdom of God was near.



PRAYER: Do you go to church? Here is a prayer to help you at church. 'God in heaven, thank you that I can go to church. Please help me learn more about Jesus there. Please help me to be part of what is going on there. May I sing the songs, listen to the Bible, and join in with the prayers. Help me to enjoy it, and to understand more and more of what it means to be part of your people. Help me to welcome others and to please you. In Jesus' name, Amen.'

GALILEE: This is where Jesus grew up, and where most of the events in the first half of Mark's Gospel happen. It is an area of land around a big lake, the Sea of Galilee, in the north of Israel. Some parts of the land around Galilee are home to Jewish people; some parts are home to non-Jewish people. Jesus will take the good news about God's coming kingdom to all parts of Galilee. Capernaum is a Jewish town in Galilee.

EVIL SPIRITS: Even at this early part of Mark's Gospel, we see that Jesus has power, and that people and things have to obey his orders. This includes evil spirits, who want to harm people. Jesus uses his power to heal and help people.

SYNAGOGUES: Jewish people would go to the temple in Jerusalem for special festivals. Jerusalem was a long journey from Galilee. At other times, through the year, Jewish people would go to a synagogue where they lived. Here they could meet together, listen to the Old Testament being read and taught. Jesus went to synagogues, teaching God's coming kingdom there. A synagogue then was like a church now.