

- ⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee
and was baptized by John in the Jordan.
¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water,
immediately He saw
the heavens being torn open
and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove.
¹¹ And a voice came from heaven,
"You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well pleased."
¹² The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness.
¹³ And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.
And He was with the wild animals,
and the angels were ministering to him.

In those days – This phrase doesn't really catch our attention and seems vaguely non-specific. Obviously it's referring immediately to the general time in which John is doing his preaching/baptizing ministry. It also seems to mark a major section division in the Gospel (see also Mark 8:1) But it's more loaded than that, "those days" refers to the days of prophetic fulfillment of which John's whole ministry is part (remember, he's fulfilling part of the prophecy in Mark 1:2-3). As a whole "in those days" refers to a time of God's saving activity for His people (which then is connected with the "day of the Lord"). Much later on Jesus uses the phrase "in those days" to refer to times of extreme judgment leading to His return (Mark 13:17, 19, 24). Matthew and Luke use the same phrase (Matt. 3:1; 24:19, 22, 29, 38; Luke 1:39; 2:1; 4:2; 5:35; 21:23). The "day of the Lord" is both judgment and grace, both historical and eschatological (end-time oriented). It would involve the new creation breaking into the old creation, and the outpouring of the Spirit on the people. When you have this whole framework in your mind, you start to see why this event really marks the beginning of the Gospel, but also the beginning of the end of all things.

Amos 8:9 ESV "And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

Isa. 11:6-8 ESV The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. [*make sure to note the immediate context before this: judgment in Isa 10:33, but hope in Isa. 11:1*]

Isa. 35:1, 4-6 ESV The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; ... Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense

of God. He will come and save you."⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

Isa. 65:17, 25 ESV "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. ...The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

Joel 2:28 ESV "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Jesus came... Mark doesn't tell any of the stories of Jesus' conception or birth, nor his flight to Egypt or the story of Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem as a boy. Just like with John, the first mention of Jesus is many years into His life (Luke 3:23 is where we get that Jesus was about 30 at the beginning of His public ministry). It obviously does not follow that that means Mark is ignorant of all those stories (it's just as likely that he didn't write about them because they were already well known), but rather that's not the focus of his account of Jesus. The beginning of the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God, is his stated focus, and while those events certainly tell something about Jesus' identity, they aren't really about the preaching of the Gospel.

Nazareth from Galilee – Because John has just been talking about one "mightier" who is coming after him, one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, expectations are set really, really high. It is somewhat surprising that what follows is this man named Jesus from Nazareth. While we all know Jesus is *the one*, you'd never really know it by this introduction. Where is the fanfare? Where is the power? And yet that's exactly how Jesus came into this world: lowly, in an unexpected way.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, geography does play an important role in the story. So for instance, here the events take place "in the wilderness" and we saw how key that (unspecified) location is in the Biblical story. Galilee is in the northern reaches of what once was the nation of Israel. By this time, it was a mixture of both Jewish and Gentile people, and would have a rather outsider, backwater feel to the Jewish "insiders" who live in or near Jerusalem (see John 7:41 or 1:46), especially then those who came out to hear and be baptized by John.

And was baptized by John – Mark's account of this event is so matter-of-fact. In other Gospels, there's much more emphasis on the incongruity of Jesus being baptized by John. Mark simply says, it happened.

When He came up out of the water – For those that “must” know. The language gives the impression that Jesus was “in” the Jordan River when He was baptized. It’s quite likely that He was fully immersed in the river, but that really isn’t the focus of the narrative.

Immediately – This word, just a small adverb, is a distinct feature of Mark’s storytelling. He uses it with great frequency, especially in the beginning of the Gospel (it’s used 11 times in the first chapter, 37 times in the whole book). It keeps the story going and much like how Matthew uses Old Testament prophecies to show that God has always been in control of this story, the story of Jesus continues to move forward and draws us into it.

He saw – Part of Mark’s telling of the story (as Matthew’s. Matt. 3:16) emphasizes that this is something only Jesus saw. This fits well with Mark’s whole narrative in which we as readers are given “insider information” about who Jesus is (i.e. Mark 1:1), while others whom we read about will have to figure this out on their own. This dramatic irony emphasizes Jesus’ identity and the lack of understanding on the part of others. In John’s Gospel account, John’s testimony about who Jesus is includes John’s own vision of the Spirit coming on Jesus (John 1:32-34). In Mark’s Gospel, John has already prophesied that the one who comes after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit, which presumes that Jesus has the Holy Spirit (1:8).

The heavens being torn open – Jesus saw the heavens being torn apart. This truly emphasizes this event as really important. The heavens being torn apart are a visual representation of God’s kingdom literally breaking into our domain. Usually in the Bible the heavens are “opened” in visions given by God. Here though the word used is much stronger. They are not merely “opened,” but “torn open” (the Greek word is the word from which we get schism). While the heavens refer to the sky, clouds, and things we see above us, on a much greater scale, the heavens stand for the domain of God (think “Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven). The splitting word here also becomes key because the end of the Gospel includes a description of what happened at Jesus’ death, the veil in the Temple was torn in two (Mark 15:38).

Ezek. 1:1 ESV In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

Jn. 1:51 ESV And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Acts 7:56 ESV And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 10:11 ESV and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

Rev. 4:1 ESV After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

And the Spirit descending on Him – This is a reference to the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament two key passages emphasize the Holy Spirit's role on a special figure who will be key to Israel's/God's story:

Isa. 11:2 ESV And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isa. 42:1 ESV Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

God is speaking here. In Greek, the word "servant" is *pais* and it can be translated either as servant or son. Obviously Jesus' unique role is a fulfillment of both senses of the word.

Isa. 61:1 ESV The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

In this passage, it is the Servant of Yahweh (a key, Messianic figure in Isaiah's prophecies) who is speaking. He will go on to describe His mission, which is a pretty concise description of Jesus' public ministry (Jesus will give sight to at least two people in Mark's Gospel (8:22-26 and 10:46-52)). The Servant is given a special commission by God and the Holy Spirit's presence enables the accomplishment of that mission.

Pay attention to other key ideas brought together here: *anointed* (Christ/Messiah) and *good news* (Gospel/evangel). Both of those ideas are connected expressly to Jesus in Mark 1:1 and Jesus will pick up with the message of Good News in Mark 1:14. Thus it is not that Jesus lacked the Holy Spirit until this point, but rather it is here that Jesus receives the Holy Spirit equipping and commissioning Him for his God-sent task.

1 Sam. 16:13 ESV Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah. (cf. also Judg. 3:10, 6:34).

As a dove – It's not completely clear what is being modified here. Is the descent of the Spirit compared to the *descent* of a dove (emphasizing flight?) or does the Holy Spirit take the shape/form of a dove (emphasizing a discernable appearance). Also, it's possible that both meanings are intended, thus the ambiguity.