

GOOD NEWS

Good Friday, 2024



Truly, this was the Son of God

Many people think that the Gospel of Mark ends with the words of the Centurion at the Foot of the Cross.

That may surprise us because, certainly, there would be no accounting for Joseph of Arimathea's burial, no placing of rock against the tomb, and no witness of Mary Magdalene of the first morning.

History tells us that Mark's gospel's ending is lost, which is why there are two versions, a long and short form. The oldest text scholars have ended with the word "because." They were afraid because..." It is genuinely a cliff hanger. Over the centuries, two endings were added.

So, why finish with the words of the Centurion? Because this is where it all started.

When we began reading through the Gospel of Mark way back in the year, we encountered a simple introduction to Jesus. There are no shepherds, mangers, virgin births, or itinerant seers. All we have is the introduction to who Jesus is.

"The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1.1)



After Jesus cries his last, the Centurion confirms this is good news. "Truly, this man was the Son of God."

A gentile. A man in charge of others. A man used to death and carnage. As a leader of men, the character of people was soon apparent to him. As Jesus cried out loud, looking up, having observed all things, he offered to us the reality that Mark set out to prove in his account of the ministry of Jesus.

When Jesus stood before the great council, or Sanhedrin, a high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the most Blessed One?" The answer that Jesus gave would have placed terror and fear in the minds and hearts of the council. "I am."

In the Passion, according to John, as Jesus is arrested, he asks the mob, "Who are you looking for?" When they respond with Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus replies, "I am he." They immediately retreated one step and fell to the ground. In uttering the words "I am," the echo of the voice of God crying out from the burning bush to Moses was felt. "I am who I am," the name of God.

The echoing of God's voice to Moses, the new Elijah, John the Baptist preparing the way, and now confirmation from Jesus' lips that he is truly the Son of the Most Blessed. Based on that testimony, Jesus is bound and sent to Pilate to be executed.

The questioning of Pilate never centred on whether or not Jesus was divine, but rather, sought to see if he was indeed some king. To claim to be a king was to set yourself against the Emperor. "You say that I am a king" is not the answer that satisfied. Mocking both Jesus and the Jews, Pilate refuses to have anything more to do with Jesus and hands him back to the Jews to execute. To keep order, a centurion was placed with the crowd.

There was darkness from noon that lasted three hours. It was no eclipse – the moon was full, the Passover Moon, so positioning-wise, it was impossible. The veil in the temple, when Jesus gave his last breath, ripped in two, from top to bottom, and as the light shone again, the shadow of the Holy of Holies was exposed, revealing where God was thought to be abandoned. The Temple had been destroyed. The prophecy that it would be destroyed was coming true.

At the foot of the Cross of Jesus was a centurion, observing all that had taken place.



Certainly, he would know that Pilate had three times declared Jesus innocent of any crimes, and he would wonder why he was being crucified. He must have heard Jesus say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He heard him promise heaven to the penitent thief. He witnessed the darkness falling on the earth, and he heard Jesus cry, "It is finished!" More than that, unlike the usual criminals who died in agony screaming bitter oaths, Jesus died quietly as he yielded his spirit to his Father in heaven. Mark 15:39 tells us that he stood facing Jesus and saw *how* Jesus died. All of that must have made a huge impression on the centurion. Finally, he felt the earthquake that split the rocks in two. Taken together, he concluded that could only have come from the Holy Spirit, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Keep Moving Ministries)

In 1965, the film *The Greatest Story Ever Told* featured a cameo appearance by John Wayne as the centurion, who drawled those immortal words, bookending the entire Gospel. It was not the end but rather a new beginning.

We leave here today, on this solemn day on which we recall how the Son of God was handed over to be crucified, dead and buried knowing that this necessary punishment for the sin of Adam, wanting to be autonomous from God's rule, and embracing to the fullest the reality of death. We prepare ourselves for the new day dawning in which the temple, or presence of God, Jesus, greets Mary Magdalene and entrusts the good news that he is indeed risen to her.

But as we enter into the fullness of this day, we also go deep into the day of preparation. It is the finalising of our Lenten journey towards recommitting ourselves to our baptismal duties of turning to Christ, walking away from our sins, challenging injustice, and renouncing all that is evil. In baptism, we, too, die and rise with Christ. It is where we all can accept that in Jesus, all things are made new.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis.

Sub Pontio Pilato, passus et se pultus est.

He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, dead and was buried.

Truly, this is the Son of God.