Mark his Words

A Dramatisation of the Gospel of St Mark
(chapters 1-12)
adapted and directed by Patrick Boyde

Semi-staged performances in Greek
with music, images and surtitles

St John’s College (Divinity School Theatre)

Tuesday 16 and Wednesday 17 February 2016
Special thanks are due to the following, without whose support the production could never have taken place:

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Simon Goldhill, Morna Hooker, Andrew Macintosh and Giles Waller contributed the essays in this programme, which you can enjoy before and after the performance.

Gillian Jondorf composed the surtitles, helped by Mary Emerson.

Sam Motherwell contributed all the original drawings and took over the final editing and tweaking of the Powerpoint Presentation.

Peter Sparks drew the series of maps for the Powerpoint Presentation, four of which are reproduced in this programme.

James and Liz Willetts will be creating a DVD of the performance.

Laura Keating organised the reservation of seats by email.

Rebecca Buncombe edited and produced this beautiful programme.

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The incidental music will be improvised by Barnaby Brown.
THE PERFORMERS

Jesus of Nazareth: Christos Tsirogiannis

Mark the Evangelist: Anthony Bowen
*Blue (C)
Yellow (G)
Red (T)
Green (A)

Anthony Bowen: Patrick Boyde
Patrick Boyde: George Papadimitrakopoulos
George Papadimitrakopoulos: Martin Worthington

Spokesman for Pharisees and Sadducees: Isidore Charalampos Katsos

Isidore Charalampos Katsos: Apostles, beggars, a father, men possessed, paralytics, voices from the crowd

Apostles, beggars, a father, men possessed, paralytics, voices from the crowd: Thomas Michaels
Thomas Michaels: Giles Waller
Giles Waller: Nazarenes, a Greek mother, a patient
Nazarenes, a Greek mother, a patient: Aleksandra Szypowska

Music composed and performed by Barnaby Brown

Projection Synchronisers
Christina Tsaknaki
Tasos Tsangalidis

*See pp. 10 and 11 for a key to the colours and initials*
The Drama of Mark

‘The Good News – or “Gospel” – of Jesus the Messiah’: Mark’s opening words introduce a book unlike any that had gone before, for he was the first to write ‘a Gospel’. Unlike – and yet familiar – for as we hear the story, with scenes following rapidly after one another, many of them linked by Mark’s favourite phrase ‘and immediately’, we seem to recognize the outlines of a Greek tragedy.

What is this ‘good news’ of Jesus Christ? At first we may think it is the good news which Jesus himself proclaims. But the more we hear of the story, the more we realize that, for Mark, it is the good news about Jesus Christ. The opening section forms a prologue which explains to the audience who Jesus is – the Christ, or Jewish Messiah; the Son of God, in whom God takes delight; the one promised in scripture and proclaimed by John the Baptist. In him God’s Spirit is at work and in the power of the Spirit he confronts Satan.

But then the story proper begins, and none of the characters in the story shows any understanding of Jesus’ true identity. They are impressed by his authority – in summoning men to follow him, in his teaching, healing, and control over unclean spirits. Only these spirits recognize him. Ordinary men and women simply marvel at his authority, and ask themselves ‘Who can this be?’ He even has power over wind and waves.

Halfway through the story comes a moment of recognition, when Peter begins to comprehend – but only partially. Mark makes sure we see the point by preceding this scene with the healing of a blind man, who – at first partially – begins to see. Then the consequences of that recognition are spelt out: Jesus is God’s anointed – but will be acknowledged as such only through suffering. Painfully, the disciples discover that if they want to follow Jesus, then they, too, must expect to serve others, not seek their own glory, and that they, too, can expect to suffer. The disciples are depicted as remarkably obtuse – a reminder of how seemingly absurd the ‘good news’ about a crucified Messiah is, and how difficult it is to be a true follower. Remarkably, it is women who are repeatedly commended for their faith and commitment.

The dénouement of the story comes in Jerusalem. Jesus enters Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, as King Solomon had done, but his authority is rejected by the Jewish authorities. The outcome is inevitable; following a travesty of a trial, Jesus is handed over to Pilate on a false charge. The story of the crucifixion emphasises repeatedly that Jesus dies as King: now at last the truth is out of the bag! And at the moment of his death, his executioner proclaims ‘Surely this man was son of God’. Through his suffering and death, the truth is revealed to a Gentile.

But there is one more scene – a short one, consisting of only 8 verses. The faithful women come to the tomb and find it empty. They are entrusted with a message to the disciples: they are to go to Galilee, and if they take that step of faith, they will see Jesus, who has been raised from the dead. The story is, after all, one of ‘good news’! Nor, in fact, is this the end, for the story is to be continued in the lives of those who have the faith and courage to obey.

Morna Hooker
What’s in a word? In the end is my beginning

Of all the shocking moments in the Gospel of Mark, none is as shocking as its last word. Our Greek texts end: *ephobounto gar*, ‘For they were afraid.’ The women who come to the tomb of Jesus find no body, and disperse in terror and tell no one what they have seen. There is no Good News, because they tell nobody; there is no resurrection, no triumphant conclusion. The ending of this most harsh of the Gospels is painfully bleak and inconclusive.

This ending is also extremely striking to a reader used to Greek prose because you simply cannot end a work with the word *gar*. This little word means ‘for’, or ‘because’, and always, as here, comes second word in its sentence. It is one of the most common ways of linking sentences in Greek, a mainstay of logical progression. It explains the pattern of things. Here, simply enough, it indicates the reason why the women remain silent and flee the tomb. The historian Thucydides, that most systematic of writers, uses *gar* in each of the four sentences that open his great history of war: each idea tied to the previous one in logical progression, ‘because’, ‘because’, ‘because’, ‘because’…. But there is no other example of any Greek work that ends with a *gar*.

Indeed, in Mark, there are very few explanations of a sort Thucydides would recognize, and the word *gar* itself is not often used in the narrative. When it does occur it is often a very simple type of explanation: Simon and Andrew were casting nets, ‘For (gar) they were fishermen’ (1:16). Throughout Mark, as in the last sentence, fear and amazement are the most commonly repeated explanations of action – and the most frequent response to Jesus. Herod is frightened of John the Baptist; scribes and Sadducees are frightened of Jesus; the disciples are repeatedly frightened by what they see. But most of all, the disciples again and again are amazed. This is not a response of admiration but one of awe and bafflement – and ignorance. In response to their difficulty, Jesus keeps asking: ‘Do you understand?’ ‘Do you still not get it?’ When the disciples are afraid in the storm at sea, Jesus upbraids them for their lack of faith: ‘Why are you cowards? Do you still not have faith?’ (4:39) – but they remain very afraid… The only time that Jesus himself is amazed is at people’s lack of faith (6.6). But confusion at Jesus’ message in this Gospel is also because Jesus announces to the disciples that he tells parables precisely so that people will not understand (4:12) – a statement Albert Schweizer called ‘repellent’. Only the disciples are to be told the true meaning – and even they remain confused and need constant encouragement.

It would seem that at the end of the Gospel both fear and the hunt for explanation have to give way to faith. The stark and aggressive challenge of the ending of Mark is for the reader to find a way not to repeat what the text depicts: awe, fear and a desire to make sense – the old sense, the old pattern of things. The final ‘because’ is a challenge to find another way of explanation.

Simon Goldhill
Secrets and Misdirection

Mark’s Gospel is a carefully and densely woven narrative whole, with masterly (and not, as seems at first glance, haphazard) interruptions and misdirection. Its principal effect on its audience, whether ancient or modern, ecclesial or secular, is one of disorientation. Like the Disciples, who continually misinterpret Jesus’ words, the reader is often brought up short, made to wonder. With no birth narrative (as in Matthew and Luke), and no ‘cosmological’ prologue (as in John), the hearer is pitched straight into the story, which proceeds with breathless urgency from one incident to the next. There is so little time for reflection, that the text demands – perhaps even more than the obviously meditative Gospel of John – a slow readerly pace.

Mark’s Jesus is both a miracle worker and an authoritative teller of parables; and yet each of these identities of ‘the Son of Man’ is complicated by the so-called ‘Messianic secret’. He continually tells those whom he heals that they are not to tell anyone. In his recent book on Mark (Meeting God in Mark), Rowan Williams entitles his second chapter ‘Telling secrets’. ‘Telling’, here, operates as both a verb and an adjective. It implies that this is a text in which secrets are told (none of Jesus’ injunctions against spreading the word seem to have been obeyed, and the Kingdom of God is revealed in parables and proclamations), and also a text in which the prominent presence of these secrets is itself ‘telling’.

Jesus, Williams argues, does not want to be known as a miracle worker (of whom there were a great many in his time). His miracles – even those provocatively performed on the Sabbath – are not like the ‘signs’ (sēmeia) in John, but responses to individuals in need, and expressions of relationship, belief and trust (most strikingly at 9:24, ‘I believe, Lord; help thou my unbelief’). They are not superficial demonstrations of divine power, but rather expressions of compassion for those suffering, or a challenge to the social structures that marginalise individuals. (In chapter 1, the leper is ‘made clean’. In chapter 6, the healing of a debilitating injury is more important than Sabbath law.) In Mark, miracles are both provocations to the unjust, and invitations to a transformed perception and relationship.

Whether in the ‘Messianic Secret’, or in the disciples’ failure to understand the meaning of what Jesus says, the ‘secrets, silences and misunderstandings’ (Rowan Williams suggests) are a part of the Evangelist’s own ‘miraculous’ effect on the audience:

It’s just a little bit like the way Buddhists talk about the use of the kōan in meditation: you are given a saying or a little story which you’re supposed to meditate on until you realize you can’t understand it in your ordinary categories, at which point enlightenment breaks in. Mark is a long kōan. It’s meant to bring us to the edge, to tell us that our understanding will not manage this in clear tidy ways. It’s a truth that can’t easily be spoken – or rather, as soon as it’s spoken, it provokes more questioning. We can absorb such a truth only by letting go of what we thought about God and ourselves.

(Meeting God in Mark, pp. 45–6)

Giles Waller
Two questions answered by a Hebrew Scholar

Could you briefly explain the differences between the language that Jesus spoke, the language in which he read scripture, and the language of ‘Mark his Words’?

Jesus’ mother tongue was (Galilean) Aramaic, and Mark records a small number of his *ipsisimma verba* in that language. Aramaic is closely related to Hebrew (perhaps as close as Spanish is to Italian). Aram, incidentally, is the semitic name for Syria.

Jesus was obviously conversant with Hebrew in the context of prayer and worship and seems to have quoted directly from the Hebrew Bible. (There are, by the way, some Aramaic portions within the Hebrew scriptures.)

Mark’s gospel is written in the widely used, semi-standardised form of post-classical Greek known as Koine. Its use as a *lingua franca* in Palestine derives from the earlier dominance of the Seleucid empires that were heirs to the empire of Alexander the Great.

Could you please say something about the charges brought against Jesus and the reason for his execution?

The gospels indicate that, in general, two parties were involved in the fall of Jesus. The Romans were, of course, the colonial power, supported by their puppet kings of the Herodian dynasty. In Jesus’ time Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee and he was known to have been present in Jerusalem at the relevant time.

The Jewish establishment consisted of the Sadducees, the aristocratic families of the traditional Temple priesthood. The Pharisees, by contrast, represented a popular movement of enthusiastic devotion to the Mosaic Law: it was to them that Jesus, despite the reported disputes, was closer in outlook and sympathy.

Jesus seems to have antagonized the Sadducees by a number of actions and words. Their primary concern, according to the contemporary historian Josephus, was to preserve the safety of the Temple and of the Jewish people. Incidents such as Jesus’ overturning the tables of the money-changers brought a threat of riots and disturbances which were prone to precipitate heavy-handed Roman repression. Jesus, then, should be liquidated to avoid all such situations inimical to law, order and the security of the Temple establishment.

It seems clear that blasphemy was a charge brought against Jesus to facilitate this course of action. Jesus, for his part, appears to have been careful not to err in this direction. But, in the eyes of his opponents, his actions, such as healing on the Sabbath, forgiving sins, associating with social outcasts, and, not least, his independent, forcefully authoritative teaching, all tended in this direction. More specifically, his use of the term ‘Son of Man’, though in itself strictly innocuous, may have been used by Jesus to indicate, in a more technical, apocalyptic sense, his inner conviction that he was the expected (though very different) Messiah. Messianic claims, even diffidently expressed, might have been enough for both Pharisees and Sadducees to accuse him of blasphemy.

The execution of criminals could lawfully be effected only by the Roman authorities. Accordingly, the Messianic claim, expressed now politically in terms of a king other than Caesar, was reported to the Roman procurator; and an explicitly reluctant Pontius Pilate handed Jesus over for crucifixion with the title ‘the king of the Jews’. It was a Roman execution: for Romans hanged culprits alive, Jews killed first and hanged the corpse.

Andrew Macintosh
The Parable of the DNA in Mark’s Gospel

With an affectionate nod in the direction of Mark 4. 30-32, I begin by asking: ‘Whereunto shall we liken the Gospel of Mark? Or with what comparison shall we compare it?’ And I answer: ‘Mark’s Gospel is like the DNA of a human gene. It uses no more than four letters (biologists refer to the four ‘bases’ in DNA as A, C, G and T) to spell out its prodigiously long, unique Tetragrammaton. If you alter the sequence of these repeated characters, you change its meaning and identity.’

It may be easier to visualise the structure of our ‘four-letter book’, if we substitute the letters with colours (just as the biologists do when reading DNA sequences). Glance at the photograph in Figure 1 at the top of the next page. It shows part of a national cycle path near the Biomedical Campus at Cambridge; and you are looking at an accurate model of a sequence in a human gene (BRCA2, decoded in 1995). The sequence is represented by 10257 plastic stripes, coloured red, green, yellow and blue (for the four bases A, C, G and T), running down the centre of the path like a gigantic bar code. As you can see, the distribution of the colours is apparently random. But you have been told that, if you were to alter the sequence…

Look next at the juxtaposed diagram in Figure 2 (remembering that the Greek noun para-bolē originally meant ‘something placed alongside’, juxta-positum). It shows a particular sequence of the four metaphorical bases that make up the metaphorical DNA specific to the Gospel of Mark. Each coloured stripe in the grid corresponds to a distinct section of the text; and the barely legible titles are taken over word for word from the rubrics printed in many Bibles to help readers find their way. Notice that, as in the cycle path, there is no discernible pattern in the succession of the colours. But if you were to alter the sequence…

In plain English, the four ‘bases’ correspond to the four principal ways in which the actions and words of Jesus are represented in the gospel. When Mark is standing in the blue corner, so to speak, he focuses on Jesus as the Son of God or the Anointed One, on someone familiar with the high style of Hebrew prophecy and poetry. Seen from the red corner, by contrast, Jesus appears as a radical outsider who deliberately clashes with the religious establishment and excels in repartee. When Mark puts on his yellow spectacles, Jesus becomes a healer of individual sufferers from mental or physical illness, and his words are limited to simple commands. Finally, green Mark presents Jesus as a discursive moralist and psychologist, offering startling precepts and insights valid in the sphere of everyday life, and also as a charismatic teacher whose most effective teaching aid is, precisely, the parable.

‘Have you still not understood the comparison’ (as Jesus repeatedly asks his disciples)? Well, I hope the thrust of the parabolē will become clearer, almost subliminally, in the course of our semi-staged performance. Four readers will be deployed consistently throughout to share the role of the narrator: the same voice will read all the passages written from the same viewpoint. The sequence and duration of the readers’ appearances at the lectern may seem random at first. But they will be making visible the DNA that differentiates Mark from the other three canonical gospels – and from any other narrative in the history of Western Man.

Patrick Boyde
**Who’s who?**

**Barnaby Brown** is a musician and composer currently writing a PhD thesis on pibroch. In this production he plays a reproduction of a Greco-Roman aulos in the Louvre.

**Anthony Bowen** is a former Orator of the University and Emeritus Fellow of Jesus College. He has been busy with Greek plays since his schooldays.

**Patrick Boyde**, Emeritus Professor of Italian, has adapted and directed a dozen and more plays in Ancient Greek since 2005.

**Malcolm Clarke** is Emeritus Professor of Law and Fellow of St John’s. He is a keen cyclist, a connoisseur of cycle paths, and a photographer.

**Simon Goldhill** is Professor of Greek and Director of CRASSH at Cambridge University, where he directs a project on the Bible and Antiquity in 19th-century Culture.

**Morna Hooker** is a Life Fellow of Robinson College and Emerita Lady Margaret's Professor in Divinity. St Mark's Gospel has been one of her life-time interests, and among her publications on that book is her *Commentary* in the Black's series.

**Gillian Jondorf** is a modern linguist who has composed the surtitles for all the Ancient Greek semi-staged productions.
Who’s who? (continued)

Isidoros Charalampos Katsos is from Athens. He took a PhD in Law in Berlin, was ordained Deacon in 2010, and is now a PhD student in Theology.

Andrew Macintosh is a Hebraist, Fellow of St John’s, Emeritus Dean and sometime President. He has given a number of courses in the faculties of Divinity and FAMES (formerly Oriental Studies).

Thomas Michaels studied at Mathematics and Physics at ETH Zürich, obtaining an MSc in both. He is now doing a PhD in Chemistry at John’s.

Sam Motherwell has drawn the images for many previous productions since 2009. He is past President of the Cambridge Drawing Society, and is still active as a crystallographer.

George Papadimitrakopoulos is a criminologist from Athens, who is about to start a Ph.D at Girton.

Peter Sparks is a Fellow of Girton. A practising architect who became a University Lecturer, he has always held and taught that Architecture is about making and representing special places rather than objects.

Aleksandra Szypowska is a third-year Classics undergraduate from Poland at Lucy Cavendish College.

Christina Tsaknaki is a PhD student in Latin literature at Peterhouse. She is originally from Athens, where she studied for her undergraduate degree in Greek Philology before coming to the UK.

Tasos Tsangalidis studied English and Linguistics at Thessaloniki, Edinburgh, Dublin and Cambridge and is Associate Professor at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Christos Tsirogiannis took his Ph.D from Hughes Hall. He is a Greek forensic archaeologist specialising in the research and repatriation of illicit antiquities.

Giles Waller is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Faculty of Divinity. He is co-editor of *Christian Theology and Tragedy* (2011).

James Willetts used to be Principal Teacher of Classics at Ardrossan Academy and is now a documentary film maker. He will be filming the performance.

Liz Willetts is a writer. She has a PhD in English Literature. She assists with the photography and filming.

Martin Worthington is a lecturer in Assyriology in the Division of Archaeology. Raised in Italy, he dabbles in languages and day-dreams of finishing a novel.