We are living in truly perilous times. Leaders in both east and west are talking about nuclear weapons as if they were children playing with Tinker Toys. Or, as the writer Annie Dillard says, “like children playing on the floor with a chemistry set mixing up a batch of TNT.” It is madness and sadly, we’re coming to take it for granted.

We just heard the opening lines from St. Mark’s GOOD NEWS. That reading was preceded by two magnificent passages: one from the prophet Isaiah and the other from the second letter attributed to St. Peter.

All three of those passages are meant to stir in us DREAMS of a better world. But, we’re not talking about fanciful dreams, wishful thinking. The dreams these writings are meant to instill in us are images of the way the Creator of this world intends it to be.

As we move into a year-long exploration of St. Mark’s Gospel, I want to take a little time to talk what we call “narrative literature.”

You see most of us grew up thinking the Gospels were history books. We thought of the Gospels as literal accounts of events that happened a couple thousand years ago.

But, the Gospels were not written as historical books, at least as we think of history books.

The best explanation I ever heard about the literary form of the Gospels came from a Protestant biblical scholar named Walter Brueggemann.

Brueggemann says that the Gospels “are not meant to be a report about what happened” [in this case, 2,000 years ago] but, he says, “a presentation in the imagination of the community, when there are tellers and listeners who have the courage to dream.”

He says that the function of the biblical story
“is not to tell what happened, 
but to help the listener to participate in its happening.”

He calls the Gospel stories “An alternative sketch of reality 
that is meant to nurture the listener into the freedom and boldness 
to act in ways the dominant culture does not approve.”

Our dominant culture, just for example,
• doesn’t take well to immigrants, except when they benefit us financially;
• supports nuclear stockpiling;
• promotes irresponsibility toward the gift of human sexuality;
• supports the growing gap between rich and poor.

Brueggemann says that the biblical stories are meant to be told and re-told 
to create an alternative world.

So, today we heard the opening words of Mark’s biblical narrative.

The first words are really the official title of the work. 
“Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.”

The title and a summary. 
The whole work is a beginning, 
a fresh start, a new way of approaching life, the dawning of a new day.

It is GOSPEL. 
Those who first heard that word Gospel probably thought of it in political terms. 
Rome promoted the “good news,” the Gospel of the god, Caesar Augustus.

No, this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the true Son of God 
Salvation comes not from Rome, nor all the other places of political power. 
Salvation comes from Jesus, THE CHRIST. 
Jesus, God’s true anointed one.

“Like a shepherd he feeds his flock, in his arms he gathers the lambs, 
close to his heart, leading the mother sheep with tenderness.”

We anticipate with Peter the dream of God for “new heavens and a new earth.”
Our waiting is to be neither passive nor anxious. The letter of Peter refers to it as an “eager waiting.” We are to be fully engaged as we wait, something like a midwife assisting at the birth of a child.

Jesus gathers us here because it is from here, as the Second Vatican Council points out, that we derive the true Christian spirit.

This is the indispensable place where we learn what it means to assist at the birth of what he calls the Kingdom of God.