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The Ritual Bridge between Narrative and Performance in the Gospel of Mark

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Abstract: The abundance of ritual descriptions in the Gospel of Mark suggests a discourse about ritual between the narrator and early audiences of the Gospel. The prominence of the ritual of baptism at the beginning (Mark 1:9–11) and anointing at the end (16:1–8), and the recurrence of themes introduced in Jesus's baptism at turning points in the Gospel (9:2–8; 10:38–39; 15:38–39) suggest broader ritual—and specifically baptismal—significance in the narrative. Recent changes helpfully differentiate narrative- and performance-critical interpretive approaches as text-oriented (narrative) and audience-oriented (performance), but these hermeneutical methods also work in concert. This article combines cognitive studies of narrative immersion with observations about the role of ritual in group identity formation and the impartation of religious traditions to analyze the narration of ritual acts in Mark. Giving attention to the use of internal focalization and description of bodily movements in ritual narrations, this article argues that depictions of rituals in Mark involve the audience in ways that deliver audience-oriented interpretations through text-oriented means. This analysis shows how Mark's ritual narrations are conducive to evoking the audience's experience of baptism, familiar to audience members as described in the undisputed Pauline epistles, the only descriptions of the rite that clearly antedate the composition of Mark. Publicly reading these narrated rituals creates an audience experience that neither requires the performance of the ritual in the context of the reading event nor an "acting out" of the ritual depicted in the narrative to create a participatory, communal experience of the text.

Keywords: Gospel of Mark; Pauline epistles; ritual studies; baptism; narrative criticism of the Bible; immersive narration; cognitive narratology; performance criticism of the Bible

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1. Introduction

The Gospel of Mark is shot through ritual descriptions (see McVann 1988, 1991, 1994; LaHurd 1990, 1994; Standaert 1997, 2010a, 2010b; Duran 2008; Bobertz 2016; Wheatley 2023). Throughout, Jesus casts out unclean spirits (Mark 1:21–28; 3:11; 5:1–20; 6:7; 7:24–30; 9:14–29), heals people through anointing and hand-laying practices (1:31, 41; 5:25–34, 41; 6:5; 7:31–35; 8:23, 25; 9:27), undergoes baptism (1:9) and anointing (14:3), and converses with disciples and leaders about ritual purity (2:16; 7:1–23).[1] More than any other canonical gospel, the narrator of Mark provides detailed descriptions of Jesus's motions, practices, and words in narrating how Jesus performs his miraculous acts.[2]

This attention to ritual practices in Mark suggests a discourse about ritual between the narrator and early audiences of the Gospel. The Gospel's narrative structure places ritual in the foreground, beginning the Gospel with the narration of Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11) and drawing it to a close with the story of a group of women coming to Jesus's tomb to perform burial anointing rites (16:1–8). Furthermore, themes from the baptism of Jesus recur at significant turning points in Mark (9:7; 10:38–39; 15:38–39), suggesting a broader thematic significance to baptism in the narrative (Scroggs and Groff 1973; Marcus 2009, pp. 635, 754, 1066–68; Klumbies 2018, p. 50; Wheatley 2023, p. 469). However, the Gospel, according to Mark, is not a manual for guiding the performance of rituals, nor a detailed record of ritual practices, even if some may have used the Gospel towards

these latter ends; it remains primarily a narrative text for conveying "the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God" (1:1).

As a textual narrative, Mark has been the subject of numerous narrative-critical studies, especially in the decades since the publication of Rhoads and Michie's pivotal *Mark as Story* (Rhoads et al. [1982] 2012). The advent of performance criticism has brought additional attention to how oral/aural aspects of the Markan text are well suited to rhetorical effect on audiences in public reading events (Boomershine 1988; Iverson 2014, 2021; Malbon 2002; Shiner 2003; Hartvigsen 2012; Whitenton 2016). However, the boundaries between narrative- and performance-critical readings of the Gospel are blurry.

Holly Hearon distinguishes between these approaches by describing narrative criticism as an approach to the gospels as texts to be read, in contrast to the performance-critical emphasis on "a storyteller who embodies the world of the story, translating it into real time and space" (Hearon 2014, p. 77). This division between treating a text as a book to be read or a script to be performed helps define these disciplinary differences, but this distinction oversimplifies a spectrum of nuanced modes of audience engagement that narrative criticism and performance criticism alike elucidate (see Section 2 below).

Kelly Iverson's (2021, p. 52) characterization of a performance event, in contrast to individualized reading, as a "proximate, corporate, transient, perceptive, and participatory activity" describes aspects of performance that this article uses as a basis for discussing features of the Markan text well-suited for audience engagement. This article begins from the general consensus among Markan scholars that the Gospel's earliest receptions occurred in public reading contexts rather than among individual readers (e.g., Best 1983; Boomershine 1988; Beavis 1989; Marcus 2000, p. 67; France 2002, p. 9; Shiner 2003; Boring 2006, p. 26; Collins 2007, p. 608; Hartvigsen 2012; Whitenton 2016; Keith 2020a). However, this article presses against performance-critical appeals to aspects of ancient performances that are, to use Iverson's words, "transient", such as reader gestures or inflection, inaccessible to historical inquiry. Recent performance critics incorporate evidence from ancient sources to reconstruct ancient reading events (Shiner 2003, pp. 49–52; Hartvigsen 2012; Whitenton 2016), approaching Mark in ways that bridge audience-oriented and text-oriented interpretive strategies, also incorporating insights from cognitive narratology (see, esp. Hartvigsen 2012, pp. 3–4; Whitenton 2016, pp. 15–20). Following Whitenton (2016, pp. 20–31), this article approaches the earliest performances of the Gospel of Mark as likely taking place in early Christian meal gatherings, with a diverse audience of insiders and outsiders to the community present. To Whitenton's hypothetical but historically probable reconstruction, this article adds emphasis on the ritual dimension of these gatherings, addressing a ritual familiar to most in the audience, baptism.

This article analyzes Mark's use of internal focalization and the narration of bodily movements in scenes that resonate with baptismal rites, arguing that depictions of rituals in Mark evoke the audience's familiarity with baptism for rhetorical and ethical effect. Focusing specifically on Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11), the healing of the Gerasene, the hemorrhaging woman, and Jairus's daughter (5:1–43), and healings of sense perception (deafness and speech (7:31–37; 9:14–29), blindness (8:22–26; 10:46–52)), this analysis shows how Mark's ritual narrations are conducive to evoking audience experience of the narrated ritual in reference to baptism. By evoking cognitive frames associated with baptism in the audience, the Markan narrator reinforces the ethical and theological agenda of the Gospel in reference to audiences' and Jesus's baptism.

Many ritual studies of Mark rely on theoretical frameworks to explain ritual relationships with narratives (e.g., McVann 1988, 1991, 1994; see LaHurd 1994) or vague (e.g., Duran 2008) and conjectured ritual contexts (e.g., Standaert 1997; Bobertz 2016). This study approaches an audience-oriented reading of Mark in a text-oriented interpretive strategy rooted in descriptions of the baptismal ritual that antedate Mark's composition. It is impossible to know the degree to which members of ancient audiences of Mark would have been baptized, but the prevalence of baptism as a rite of initiation into Christian groups is attested strongly throughout many early Christian documents (e.g., Gal 3:26–4:7;

1 Cor 1:13–17; 12:13; Rom 6:3–5; Col 2:12; Matt 28:18–20; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; 1 Pet 3:12; Did. 7:1–4; 9:5; Herm. Vis. 3.7.3 (15:3)). However, following commonly accepted dates for the composition of Mark (ca. 65–75 CE, prior to Matthew and Luke-Acts), only the undisputed Pauline epistles provide historically prior points of comparison for Markan narration of rituals (see Wheatley 2023, pp. 474–75).[3] Whether or not individual audience members had been baptized, they would plausibly know of the rite, either from seeing or hearing of it in the community. For baptized audience members, this rite fundamentally structured their identity formation as individuals, members of the community, and as the interpreting audience of Mark (Wischmeyer 2011).

This article analyzes how Markan uses of sensorimotor description and internal focalization sound notes that resonate with descriptions of baptism in Mark 1:9–11 and the descriptions of baptism in Paul's undisputed epistles (Gal 3:26–4:7; 1 Cor 1:13–17; 12:13; Rom 6:3–5). Applying Rutger Allan's characterization of immersive narration to these passages in Mark shows how these texts would be conducive to evoking the audience's prior experience of baptism for rhetorical and ethical effect. This interpretive strategy provides an audience-oriented reading of the Gospel, based on text-oriented analysis, supplemented by historical depictions of baptism prior to or internal to the Gospel. This approach advances the thesis that ritual provides a bridge to audience experience without appealing to aspects of the rite or reading event that are inaccessible to historical inquiry, such as a public reader's presumed inflections or gestures or the conjectured practice of the ritual in the immediate chronological context of the reading event (contra Standaert 1997, 2010a, 2010b).

2. Narrative, Performance, and the Role of Ritual

Before undertaking this study of narrated rituals in Mark, it will be helpful to add nuance to Hearon's distinction between narrative and performance criticisms that have developed since her study and to outline how studies of ritual fit with these forms of criticism. The recent presentation of New Testament literary criticism by Michal Beth Dinkler (2020) and Kelly Iverson's (2021) study of performance, audience experience, and the gospels provide helpful overviews of current scholarship on these distinct approaches to New Testament texts. Furthermore, sociocultural (W. A. Johnson 2000, 2010) and cognitive studies of ancient reading (Nässelqvist 2016) and its interrelation with ritual practices in Assmann (2006) and Uro (2016) show the promise of analyzing the role of rituals in communities in which the Gospel of Mark would have been publicly read.

Dinkler (2020, pp. 23–27) uses Meyer Abrams' (1953) basic taxonomy of literary approaches to simplify the complex web of literary methodologies applied in New Testament studies, oriented around "four poles of interpretive prioritization: An *author* composes a *text* for a *reader* about the *universe*" (Dinkler 2020, p. 23, emphasis original). Leaving aside considerations of author and universe, Dinkler categorizes narrative critical studies of the New Testament as "work-oriented, objective approaches" that "deal with the literary text as an object of study in its own right" (Dinkler 2020, p. 25). Narrative approaches, according to Dinkler (2020, p. 28), focus "mainly on the world of the story" and presuppose literary unity to the text. These differ from reader-focused interpretive strategies such as Abrams' "pragmatic, audience-oriented approaches [that] take as their main focus the literary text's effects upon its audience(s)" (Dinkler 2020, p. 25; see Abrams 1953, p. 26). These approaches "place greater emphasis on the audience's constitutive role in meaning-making as a social construction" (Dinkler 2020, p. 29). Taking these two foci of text- and audience-oriented approaches as a guide, narrative criticism focuses on a literary work as text to be read, based on how the words and stories work together to convey a complete story to the reader(s). Audience-oriented criticism provides greater emphasis on the impact the text has on the reader(s), but these two approaches can also work in concert.

In relation to literary criticism, performance criticism employs an audience-oriented interpretive strategy. Kelly Iverson uses the definition of performance by Richard Schechner, who says, "performance is an activity done by an individual or group in the presence of and

for another individual or group" (Schechner 2003, p. 22 n. 10; Iverson 2021, p. 8). Iverson (2021, p. 8) adapts this to emphasize the communal aspect and the presence of an audience, saying, "performance is a communal affair that typically involves more than one audience member". He characterizes performance as "a proximate, corporate, transient, perceptive, and participatory activity that, in many respects, is discernable from the modern reading experience" (Iverson 2021, p. 52). Performance criticism focuses on the presence of an audience in a reading or re-enactment of a text and often places additional emphasis on the reader or performer(s) of a text as agents who interpret the text through their vocalization and bodily expressions in the reading or performance event.

One challenge with performance criticism of early Christian texts is that the ancient performances it attempts to analyze are, as Iverson (2021, p. 52) describes them, "transient", that is, not directly accessible to modern interpreters since they occurred in times and spaces no longer present, with audiences who left little record of these events. Iverson (2021, p. 107) uses depictions of nonverbal visual behaviors in the gospels and Acts such as facial expression, eye movement, gestures, and posture, as well as movement in space and bodily and facial appearances, to indicate the value of nonverbal communication in the New Testament era (Iverson 2021, pp. 113–14). While this and other ancient evidence indicate a range of possible bodily and vocal expressions contemporary to the composition of the gospels, it is not necessary that attentive public readers of these texts would "attempt to reproduce the nonverbal cues described in the narrative" (Iverson 2021, p. 115). Iverson and Larry Hurtado debate over the degree to which people reading engaged in affective interpretation of texts for their audiences (see Hurtado 2014; Iverson 2016, and the rejoinder in Hurtado 2016). Iverson (2016, pp. 192–98) ultimately offers a modest set of bodily movements (e.g., sitting, standing, hand extension) comprising the majority of ancient depictions of reading events, even if he suggests further overlap between theatrical and oratorial performances.

The precise vocal and nonverbal elements of each transient public reading event of the gospels in early Christianity remain beyond the scope of critical inquiry, but sociocultural studies of ancient reading practices, coupled with cognitive studies of narratology and ritual, provide means for understanding how audiences encountered narrative texts in antiquity. W. A. Johnson's (2000, 2010) sociocultural studies of elite cultures of reading in Roman antiquity show that ancient reading was a communal experience quite different from modern, solitary, silent reading practices, involving "the negotiated construction of meaning within a particular sociocultural context" (W. A. Johnson 2010, p. 12; see also Iverson 2016, pp. 192–98). Johnson's work has spurred studies of early Christian and Jewish reading by Chris Keith (2015, 2020a, 2020b) and others (L. A. Johnson 2023; Krauß et al. 2020; Nässelqvist 2016; Pokorný 2013) that have shown that early Christian groups publicly read the gospels, epistles, and other scripture as a central part of their group identity-formation, in ways that included increasingly ritualized bodily actions.

Within the sociocultural contexts of early Christianity, ritual practices were central to the identity formation of groups who publicly read the gospels. The earliest extant evidence of reading practices within groups of Jesus's followers, the Pauline epistles, commend the public reading of the epistles themselves (Col 4:16) and also describe already-established ritual practices that are central to the identity formation of the readers (baptism: Rom 6:3–5; Gal 3:27; eucharist: 1 Cor 11:20–26, 33; preaching: Gal 1:7–9; 1 Cor 15:1–11; recounting traditions about Jesus: Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 7:10–11). William Johnson sees cultural forces such as "inherited traditions" shaping "the rules of engagement" with texts for a reading community and how "the reader's conception of 'who s/he is,' that is, to what reading community s/he thinks to belong, is an important, and determinative, part of the reading event" (W. A. Johnson 2000, p. 603). Jan Assmann sees rituals as essential to the oral transmission of texts prior to writing: "Festival and ritual are the typical forms in which societies without writing institutionalize the expanded context of cultural texts. Ritual ensures the retrieval of communication, the communicative presence of the text" (Assmann 2006, pp. 105–6). Assmann defines these "cultural texts" as texts with a "binding nature"

uniting author to reader, functioning as "*formative* texts" that "formulate the self-image of the group and the knowledge that secures their identity" (Assmann 2006, p. 104, emphasis original). These "cultural texts... define the identity and cohesiveness of society. They structure the world of meaning within which communication takes place" (Assmann 2006, p. 104). In the early stages of the shift from oral to written texts, ritual continues to bind the community to the text: "Despite the growing quantity of written matter, early written cultures are decisively based on such ritual coherence" (Assmann 2006, p. 124). Sandra Huebenthal highlights the significance of table-fellowship rituals of early Christianity for framing audience identity formation and the Markan form of collective memory of Jesus (Huebenthal [2014] 2020, pp. 82, 453–66, 509). Borrowing insights from cognitive studies of ritual, Risto Uro has shown that "rituals convey religious knowledge" and "facilitate the *transmission* of religious traditions" (Uro 2016, pp. 67–68, emphasis original). This ritual form of communication is concerned with "the body and its interaction with the environment", that can be analyzed through cognitive studies of "embodied and extended cognition" (Uro 2016, pp. 67–68).

This approach to ritual as an embodied mode of communication, subject to cognitive analysis, suggests its value to performance-critical interpretations of Mark, as well as the salience of other cognitive studies of how audiences experience narrative texts. Especially when analyzing a text as filled with descriptions of rituals as the Gospel of Mark is, querying how Mark's narration of ritual practices engages audience experiences of the narrated events enables rooting an audience-oriented reading of the Gospel in concrete practices contemporary with its composition. This "ritual bridge" transcends distinctions between narrative and performance criticisms of Mark.

3. Immersive Narration and Ritual Description

Scholars of ancient narrative, incorporating cognitive studies of how readers encounter textual narratives, highlight experiential aspects of the narrative that "can lead to a collapse of the distance between the story world and the reader's own world in terms of both time and space" (Grethlein et al. 2020, p. 4). One aspect of experiential narration significantly attested in cognitive studies is narrative immersion. Immersion involves a "feeling of being drawn into the represented world, and of witnessing what goes on there [. . .] [to] stimulate [the recipient] to experience that world almost as if it were a slice of real life" (Grethlein et al. 2020, p. 4). This account of immersive narrative arises from cognitive studies involving three realms of immersive experience: spatial, temporal, and emotional immersion (Ryan 2015, pp. 85–114; summarized in Allan 2022, p. 274). People in the fields of classical and early Christian narratology have recently analyzed these phenomena in ancient Greco-Roman and early Christian texts, including Homer and Thucydides (Allan 2020), Lysias (Allan 2022), Apuleius (Tagliabue 2021), late Imperial period Greco-Roman works (Webb 2009), and *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Tagliabue 2019). Cognitive narratological analysis of immersive narration offers a promising path forward for analyzing how audiences would experience a publicly narrated ritual such as Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11).

Rutger Allan (2022, pp. 276–78) proposes six literary features that contribute to the experience of immersion in a narrative world (see also Allan 2020, pp. 18–19; Tagliabue 2021):

1. Spatial detail;
2. Sensorimotor details that evoke "experientially rich" cultural frames or personal memories and embodied mental images of the scene;
3. Slow narrative pace without deviation or compression of chronological order;
4. Shift to internal perspective or direct speech inviting vicarious experience of the scene;
5. Arousing emotional involvement or identification with character or plot;
6. Focusing attention on the scene without drawing attention to scene-external elements of narration, text, or the outside world.

These elements can interrelate, leading to greater immersive quality, or they can be interspersed with literary devices that create distance, leading to a mixed character in a

narrative. Ryan (2015, pp. 68–69) outlines four degrees of immersion (see also Allan 2022, p. 278):

1. "Concentration": readers remain subject to external distraction;
2. "Imaginative involvement": readers retain faculties to transport into or remove themselves from the story world;
3. "Entrancement": readers are so absorbed in the narrative world that external stimuli lose effect;
4. "Addiction": encompassing "the loss of capacity to distinguish textual worlds (. . .) from the actual world.

Ascertaining the degree to which an ancient audience would experience immersion in a narrative is historically impossible, and different audience members would be more subject than others to immersive elements in a text. One can still surmise that a text with more immersive features and a relative absence of distancing elements will be more conducive to audience immersion. Moreover, audiences whose cultural frames, personal memories, and emotional involvement with the narrative overlap significantly with the story world of the narrative will be more open to experiencing immersion in the text.

The degree of similarity between Allan's description of immersive narration and ritual practices themselves makes narrated rituals in Mark fitting places to undertake an audience-oriented interpretation of the Gospel rooted in the historical probability of their familiarity with the baptismal rite and the textual presentation of baptism in Mark 1:9–11. Ritual practices involve space (e.g., baptism: font, river; eucharist: room, table/altar), sensorimotor experience (experiences of touch, taste, smell, sound, movement), progress through time (before/after the ritual), and personal experience. Furthermore, rituals evoke emotions in participants in varying degrees (see Whitehouse 2004, pp. 63–85), inviting participants' focus on the performance of the rites. Overall, examining the narration of rituals in Mark provides a way to undertake text-oriented analysis of the Markan narrative sensitive to its reception and an audience-oriented reading of Mark that privileges narrative features of the text over conjectured aspects of performance. The remainder of this article presents this audience-oriented analysis of baptism-like elements in Mark.

4. Immersed in the Text: The Baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–11

The Markan narrator presents the opening of the Gospel as a new beginning, enacted in baptism, foretold in the scriptures. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Mark 1:1) unfolds "as it is written" (1:2), concerning "John baptizing in the wilderness" and "proclaiming a baptism" (κηρύσσων βάπτισμα, 1:3).[4] The baptism John proclaims is not about the ritual itself but the person and rite it anticipates. John speaks of "one coming after me who is stronger" (1:7), "who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (αὐτὸς δὲ βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, 1:8). The narration depicts more than a ritual; it conveys an anticipation of divine action. This anticipation goes beyond the scene, extending to the audience through immersion in the narrative.

Beginning in Mark 1:9, the narrator uses features Allan (2020, 2022) and Tagliabue (2021) identify as conducive to the reader's immersion. The narration of Jesus's baptism in Mark 1:9–11 includes several spatial details (Nazareth, Galiliee, Jordan river, "rising from the waters", the heavens) that "evoke a 'sense of place'" (Allan 2022, p. 276), whether the geographical places or a ritual space used for baptism. The narration of Jesus's arrival "in those days" (ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις, 1:9) conveys an "iconic temporal organization" (Allan 2022, p. 277), using Septuagintal language that conveys an apocalyptic, biblical significance to Jesus's arrival (Palu 2012, pp. 147–50; see also Maloney 1981, p. 86; Marcus 2000, p. 163). The narration of Jesus's arrival also introduces a series of temporal markers (καὶ εὐθὺς, 1:10a, 12a) with an absence of "deviations from chronological order" (Allan 2022, p. 277). Within the narration of time in Mark 1:9–11, the words καὶ εὐθὺς ("and immediately", 1:10) introduce immediacy into the timeframe of the story that makes clear the chronological narration "approximates narrated time" (Allan 2020, p. 18).

This immediacy also marks a transition in perspective, including direct speech that invites the audience's vicarious experience of the scene. The focalization shifts from the external narrator, "Jesus came (…) and was baptized" (1:9), to Jesus's perspective ("he saw", 1:10b; Marcus 2000, pp. 164–65) within the immediacy of "*proximal* ('here' and 'now') deixis" (Allan 2020, p. 19, emphasis original; so too, Marcus 2000, p. 159). For a moment, the narrator seems to disappear, giving way to a form of narration that places the audience in Jesus's experience of the events: "a voice occurred from heaven" (φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, 1:11a). This internal perspective is conducive for "the recipient to vicariously experience ('view') the situation from a spatio-temporal or cognitive-emotional viewpoint located in the scene" (Allan 2022, p. 277). The audience sees what Jesus sees ("he saw", 1:10b), and they hear what Jesus hears (Marcus 2000, pp. 164–65; Hartvigsen 2012, p. 123).

The audience hears an affirmation of divine sonship with Jesus, "you are my son, the beloved, which whom I am well pleased" (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα, Mark 1:11b). This recalls baptismal rites that predate the composition of Mark (cf. Gal 3:26; 4:5–6; Rom 8:15). This recall can "activate experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schemas/frames or personal memories" (Allan 2022, p. 276), namely the experience of the baptismal rite in which audience members may have participated (Marcus 2000, pp. 164–65). In Paul's description of baptism in Gal 3:26–27, those who are baptized become "sons" (υἱοί, see Johnson Hodge 2007, pp. 69–70) by virtue of being "baptized into Christ" (εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Gal 3:27) and "through faith in the Anointed One, Jesus" (διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, Gal 3:26). Paul describes this transformation into sons in reference to the reception of the Spirit, who produces a cry of "Abba, Father" in recipients (Gal 4:6). Elsewhere, Paul ascribes the Abba cry to the Spirit, who "co-testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ, Rom 8:16). As a ritual Paul presents as being so intimately bound with the identity formation (Gal 3:26–29) and ethics (Rom 6:1–4) of his audiences, baptism has significant potential as "personal memories" and a "cognitive (…) schema" (Allan 2022, p. 277) to activate emotional and sensory immersion in audiences.

With respect to sensory immersion, the Markan narrator's focus on concrete objects and sensory details, such as Jesus "rising from the water" (ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος), seeing the heavens "torn" (σχιζομένους), and the Spirit descending "as a dove" (ὡς περιστερὰν, 1:10) aids immersive reading. These "sensorimotor details", whether concrete or metaphorical, associated with the "experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schemas" of baptism and beliefs about Jesus, are conducive to an immersive experience, especially when coupled with description of sights, sounds, and actions (Allan 2022, p. 276). The narrative proceeds in a style that "directs the recipient's attentional focus firmly to the represented scene", absent of emphasis on "'offstage' elements such as the narrator, the text itself as a medium, and the extradiegetic discourse world" (Allan 2022, p. 277). The overall effect has a high likelihood to "give rise to an affective response (…) arousing feelings of identification and empathy" with Jesus (Allan 2022, p. 276).

The Markan narrative elsewhere indicates a preoccupation with the characters' identification with Jesus and his death and resurrection, metaphorically characterized as a baptism: "Are you able (…) to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? (…) The baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized" (δύνασθε (…) τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθῆναι; (…) τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθήσεσθε, Mark 10:38–39; so too, Wischmeyer 2011, p. 749). Jesus also characterizes discipleship in reference to death: "take up one's cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Furthermore, at Jesus's death, the narrator recalls some immersive elements from the baptism of Jesus: "torn" (σχίζω, Mark 15:38), "son of God" (υἱὸς θεοῦ), and reference to the Spirit (ἐκπνέω, 15:39; see Motyer 1987; Ulansey 1991). Overall, emphasis on baptism as identification with Jesus, through participation in his death in discipleship, reinforces an immersive reading of Mark 1:9–11 throughout the remaining narrative, focused toward engendering an interpretation of baptism similar to Paul's in Rom 6:3–5, as well as Gal 2:19–20, 3:26–4:7; Rom 8:11–17 (Wheatley 2023, pp. 474–75; so also, Scroggs and Groff 1973).

Although one might surmise that a public reading of Mark may be more conducive to an immersive experience of the text than silent reading, the immersive reading proposed above does not require any further "performative" aspects of vocalization, gestures, or re-enactment to assess its potential to affect an audience. Neither does it postulate the performance of the baptismal rite in the context of the reading event. Admittedly, audience members who had previously experienced a baptismal rite, whether through participation or observation, would be more primed to activate the cultural frames and memories evoked in Mark's references to baptism than those unfamiliar with baptism. However, the similarity of Mark 1:9–11 and Mark's other references to baptism with the rite Paul assumes his audiences in Galatia, Corinth (1 Cor 12:13), and those in Rome he has yet to meet suggests that Mark either knows Paul's rite, or that Paul refers to a rite known widely enough to extend beyond his immediate influence. The narrator and earliest audiences of Mark might know this rite from non-Pauline sources, but the Pauline evidence provides a *terminus ante quem* for a baptismal rite associated with the gift of the Spirit, divine sonship, and identification with Christ (including his death) prior to the composition of Mark.

In this way, the baptismal ritual provides an aid to audience immersion in the Markan narrative that can be postulated with attention to the Markan narrative and the sociocultural background of the ritual practices of early Jesus followers. This ritual bridge between text-oriented narrative readings and audience-oriented performance readings of Mark offers a set of circumstances in which audience engagement can be analyzed without the introduction of conjectured elements of live performance, other than the public reading of the text, based on narrative elements internal to the text. In the next two sections, further evidence of baptism-related narratives in Mark is analyzed with attention to their immersive features, their relation to baptism, and their possible effect on audiences.

5. Healing, Perception, and Ritual in Mark 5

Although the Gospel of Mark also has no explicit description of exorcism or hand-laying practices accompanying baptism, the narrator depicts Jesus's touch and exorcisms in contexts that resemble Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11) and early Christian baptismal rites (e.g. Ambrose, *Sacr.* 1.5.18; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 5.4; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procat.* 14; *Trad. ap.* 41). Although the narrator does not explicitly name these healings as rituals, the three stories in Mark 5—healing the man with the legion (Mark 5:1–20), the hemorrhaging woman (5:25–34), and Jairus's daughter (5:21–24, 35–43)—abound with ritualized elements that are conducive to audience immersion in the experience of characters' healing, in ways evocative of the baptismal rite (see Jensen 2021). As in the sense-perception healings considered below, each narrative in Mark 5 describes spatial details and movements that evoke ritual practices in reference to the healings Jesus accomplishes, concentrating sight perception (ὁράω, 5:6, 14, 16, 22, 32; θεωρέω, 5:15, 38), salvation (σώζω, 5:23, 28, 34), and touch (ἅπτω, 5:27, 28, 30, 31; χείρ, 5:23, 41) (see Marcus 2000, pp. 364–65). Additionally, the repetition of language of faith (πίστις, 5:34; πιστεύω, 5:36) and references to people as son (υἱός, 5:7) or daughter (θυγάτριον, 5:23; θυγατήρ, 5:34, 35) resonate with baptismal themes elsewhere (cf. πίστις, υἱός, Gal 3:26; βαπτίζω, 3:27). Additional concern with uncleanliness (ἀκάθαρτος, 5:2, 8, 13; χοῖρος, 5:11, 12, 13, 16; cf. 5:25, 35), associated in Mark 7:1–5 with ritual washings (κοινός, 7:2, 5; ἄνιπτος, 7:2; νίπτω, 7:3; βαπτίζω, βαπτισμός, 7:4) underscores possible baptismal figuration in Mark 5 (so too, Standaert 2010b, p. 398; see also 1 Cor 6:11). Setting these scenes after a set of sea crossings demonstrating Jesus's power over the waters and death (4:35–41; 5:21; cf. 6:45–52, see Malbon 1984, p. 377) strengthens a baptismal theme.

This resonance recapitulates numerous elements of the baptismal rite in ways that could evoke baptism in varying degrees for the audience. Like baptism, these healings share a *telos* of transformation related to baptism-associated elements, water, touch, and faith, that bring about changes in body, spirit, and perception, illustrating expected effects of the baptismal rite (see also McVann 1991; cf. Mark 2:1–12, with a similar set of baptismal resonances, absent water). Furthermore, in Mark 5, Jesus does what early Christians

understood baptism to do: he breaks the power of evil (cf. Gal 4:3; Rom 6:6), defeats the forces of death (Mark 5:13, 39, 42; cf. Rom 6:6), clothes restored people in new garments (Mark 5:15; cf. Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 15:53–54; Rom 13:14; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), provides an internally healing and illuminating touch (5:28–30, 41; cf. Eph 1:18; Heb 6:4), creates new sons and daughters (Mark 5:23, 34, 35; cf. Gal 3:26; Rom 8:15–16), and brings resurrection (Mark 5:41–42; Rom 6:5; 8:17).

The narrator uses spatial detail, sensorimotor details, a slow pace, and an absence of scene-external elements in Mark 5 to create an immersive experience for the audience. The spatial details described in Mark 5 include Jesus's movements relative to the sea (Mark 5:1, 21) and the boat ("out of the boat", ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου, 5:2a; "in the boat", 5:18, 21), the location of the Gerasene "out of the tombs" (ἐκ τῶν μνημείων, 5:2b) and "among the tombs" (ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν, 5:3a, 5a), the topography of the Gerasene region ("hillside" 5:11, "steep bank" 5:13), and the location in Jairus's house (5:38, 40). The rich sensorimotor details in these scenes include characters falling at Jesus's feet (5:6, 22, 33), the rushing of swine into the sea (5:13), the healed Gerasene sitting (5:15), concerns with hand-laying (5:23, 27–31) and grasping with the hand (5:41), and descriptions of internal sensations of the hemorrhaging woman and Jesus (5:29–30). Each story proceeds with a slow pace that introduces details as they are relevant to the story, with a bare minimum of departures from chronological order or scene-external narration. The Gerasene and hemorrhaging woman stories insert background detail at the beginning (5:4–6, 25–26), preventing a departure from chronological narration once inciting action begins. The only departure from chronological order takes place in the inversion of the events of Mark 5:7–8, in which the response of the demoniac, "What do I have to do with you, Jesus Son of God Most High" (translation following Marcus 2000, pp. 187, 343; cf. 1:24), precedes the exorcism formula that occasioned it, "Come out, unclean spirit, from the person" (5:8b).

The inversion of chronology in Mark 5:7–8, along with the emphasis on the sea and touch, is compatible with a baptismal reading of these stories (so too, Bobertz 2016, p. 53). Beginning with Mark 5:7–8, the re-ordering of chronology places the dialogue and movements of the characters in greater continuity with the ordering of events of Jesus's baptism. Jesus exits the water (5:2a; cf. 1:10a), encounters a spirit (5:2b; cf. 1:10c), who tears things open (5:4b; cf. 1:10b), descends (5:6; cf. 1:10d), and attests to Jesus as God's son (5:7; cf. 1:11; Gal 4:6; 8:15–16). Jesus's passages through the sea (5:1, 21 cf. 4:35), over which he has just exerted dominion (4:39, 41), and in which he sends evil forces of death to drown (5:13) evokes the Exodus sea crossing (Marcus 2000, pp. 348–49), using language Paul employs to liken the Israelites' sea-crossing to baptism (διέρχομαι, θάλασσα, 1 Cor 10:1–2, cf. 4:35, 41; 5:1, 13, 21). Similarly, as in the healing stories considered above, the emphasis on touch also correlates to early baptismal rites associated with the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:5–6). Although none of the passages from Mark 5 are explicit depictions of baptism, their language and immersive narration together have the potential to strengthen the evocation of the audience's memories of the "experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schema" of baptism begun in Mark 1:9–11 (Allan 2022, p. 276).

The narration of Mark 5 conveys further immersive effects, using language that is conducive to an affective response. Each episode begins with the narration of background details that heighten the emotional impact of the following story. The narrative of the demoniac begins and ends with details that fit Allan's criterion of "steering the recipient's emotional evaluation of the characters and their behavior (such as admiration, sympathy, pity or contempt)" (Allan 2022, p. 277). In Mark 5:3–5, the description of the demoniac "who had his dwelling in the tombs" (5:3a), unable to be restrained by chains (5:3b), breaking any chains or shackles used to bind him (5:4) communicates a sense of desperation to demoniac's "terrible plight" (Marcus 2000, p. 350). The demoniac's continual "crying and cutting himself with stones" (5:5) adds emotional resonance that steers the audience towards pity, or perhaps fear or disgust, towards the man's situation (Bolt 2003, p. 143). The use of language for urgent request (παρακαλέω) that repeats in the Gerasene (5:10, 12, 17, 18) and Jairus (5:23) stories, coupled with the Gerasene's enthusiastic proclamation

of Jesus's healing power (5:19–20) further contributes emotional weight to the narrative. Jairus's repeated request (παρακαλεῖ αὐτὸν πολλά, 5:23a), coupled with the description of his "little daughter" (θυγάτριον, 5:23) who "has it terminally" (so Marcus 2000, p. 356) intensifies the emotional impact of the story, further heightened by the suspense-inducing delay brought by the intercalated narrative of the hemorrhaging woman (Marcus 2000, p. 365). The introduction of the hemorrhaging woman as "suffering many things from many physicians, spending all she had, and benefitting in no way, but rather growing worse" (5:26) evokes sympathy that interrelates with Jairus's daughter's desperate situation (Marshall 1989, pp. 104, 133; Marcus 2000, pp. 366–67). The woman's "fear and trembling" (5:33) in response to her healing and Jesus's questions adds emotional detail that can enhance the audience's affective response. The conclusion of the healing of Jairus's daughter is filled with emotion, with its interruptive news of her death (5:35), the description of the "tumult, crying, and much wailing" Jesus saw at the house (5:38b), contrasted with their "laughing" (5:40a) and being "overcome with amazement" (5:42b). These emotional descriptions create an "artful and pathetic" scene (Marcus 2000, p. 370) that likely evoked "reverent awe and grateful homage" in audiences, following characters' responses (Marcus 2000, p. 373; so too, Hartvigsen 2012, p. 236).

The narration of the characters' perspective is particularly poignant in Mark 5, providing a powerful prompt for audience immersion in ways that correlate to the narration of Jesus's baptism. As in the narrations of healed perception considered below, the narrator uses a high concentration of direct speech and dialogue throughout (e.g., Mark 5:5–13, 23, 30–34, 35–41), that gives immediacy to the proceedings. However, shifts to various internal perspectives throughout these narratives create the strongest immersive effect (see Allan 2022, p. 277). Beginning with the Gerasene, the narrator shifts from the background narration of 5:2–5 to describing the scene from the demoniac's perception, "Seeing (ἰδών) Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down to worship him" (5:6). The narrator unfurls the rest of the interaction between Jesus and the demoniac from the perspective of what the demons heard (5:8–9) and saw (5:11–12), immersing the audience in a spirit-influenced perception of Jesus's identity (5:7) and power (5:12–13; cf. 1:24–25; 3:11), much like an inversion of Jesus's baptism (1:10–11). After the exorcism, the narrator shifts the perspective to the townspeople, who "came to see (ἰδεῖν) what is was that happened" (5:14b) and "saw (θεωροῦσιν) the demoniac seated, clothed and in his right mind" (5:15a). This experience transforms them from bystanders into "those who saw how this happened (οἱ ἰδόντες πῶς ἐγένετο) to the demoniac" (5:16), much like the centurion at the crucifixion who "seeing (. . .) how Jesus expired" (ἰδὼν (. . .) οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν, 15:39). Similarly to the demoniac, Jairus, "seeing (ἰδών) (Jesus), fell to his feet" (5:22b). The narrator focalizes sight through these characters, modeling transformational perception of Jesus that produces change in the Gerasene and Jairus and resistance in the demons and the townspeople (Marcus 2000, pp. 352–53). So too, at Jairus's house, the narrator shifts perspective to Jesus's hearing ("overhearing what they said" 5:36) and vision ("he saw a tumult" 5:38), focalizing the scene through his supernatural perception. Just as the description of Jesus's vision of the opened heavens and descending Spirit follows his baptism, focalizing the disclosure of his identity as God's "beloved son" (1:10–11), the narrator characterizes the encounters with Jesus of faithful people and unclean spirits alike with perceptive vision, conveyed to the audience in immersive ways that are conducive to their vicarious experience. Characters' perception produces faith (5:34, 36) that brings salvation (Marcus 2000, pp. 360–61; Black 2023, pp. 238–39).

The narrator's shifts in perspective become most immersive in the story of the hemorrhaging woman's encounter with Jesus in Mark 5:25–34, where the woman's touch creates a union between Jesus's and her perception, characteristic of the immersive experience of Jesus's baptism the narrator provides in Mark 1:10–11. After the narrator's background narration, the focalization of the scene shifts to the woman's hearing ("having heard (ἀκούσασα) about Jesus", 5:27). The narration of the entire scene proceeds with a series of circumstantial participles, leading up to the first indicative verb, describing when she

"touched (ἥψατο) his garment" (5:27) (Marcus 2000, p. 366). The description of her inner supposition that follows depicts this act of touching as an exercise of faith, "For she said, 'If I but touch his garments, I will be saved'" (5:28; cf. "Your faith (πίστις) has saved you", 5:34) (Marcus 2000, p. 368). The narrator portrays the result of this faithful touch as an instantaneous (εὐθύς, 5:29a, 30a), simultaneous, internalized perception in the woman's body (ἔγνω τῷ σώματι, 5:29b) and in Jesus ("knowing in himself (ἐπιγνοὺς ἐν ἑαυτῷ) that power had gone out from him", 5:30b). Jesus's circumspect gaze (περιβλέπω, 5:32) gives way to the woman's inner self-perception, "knowing (εἰδυῖα) what had happened to her" (5:33b). The narrator offers the audience an immersive viewpoint of the woman's perception of her healing and Jesus's sensation of power flowing out of him in a reversal of roles: her suffering has become his experience (see Moss 2010, pp. 514–18). By virtue of immersive narration, her healing also becomes the audience's experience (Hartvigsen 2012, pp. 239–43). Her physical contact with Jesus brings about a narrative identification between the two that brings about his experience of her flux and her experience of salvation. As in Jesus's baptism (1:9–11) and Paul's baptismal rite (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15), the woman becomes a daughter (θυγάτηρ, 5:34; cf. υἱός, 1:11; Gal 3:26; 4:6–7; Rom 8:14) by contact with Jesus through faith (πίστις, 5:34; cf. Gal 3:5, 25–26) (see Marcus 2000, p. 369). As a result, she experiences a form of perception that the narrator elsewhere equates with the influence of spiritual forces (πνεῦμα, 1:10; 1:24–25; 3:11; 5:6–7; cf. ἐκπνέω, 15:39). Paul predicates similar knowledge of self and of God to the gift of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9–16; Gal 4:9), given in baptism (Gal 4:6; 1 Cor 12:13).

Together, the correlation of these elements conducive to audience immersion in the narrative with settings (water), bodily movements (touch), language (son, daughter), and perspectives (hearing, sight) that are common to the baptismal rites contemporary to the audience suggests that the narrator uses the audience's experience of baptism as a cultural schema that can bind them to the world of the text. This ritual, immersive bridge can aid in persuading the audience towards adoption of the ethics and ideas (see Allan 2022, p. 275) conveyed in the Gospel, such as faith, identification with Jesus's mission, and following his "way" of suffering and death (see Section 6 below). This immersive identification with Jesus and the characters he heals also reinforces interpretations of who Jesus is and what the baptismal ritual accomplishes by connecting memorable narratives to the perceived effects of baptism: it drowns evil and sin (5:13; cf. Rom 6:3, 6, 11), clothes in new garments of wholeness and life (Mark 5:15; cf. Gal 3:27), brings internal wisdom and healing from uncleanness (Mark 5:15, 29; Rom 6:4, 19; 12:3), restores perception (Mark 5:29–30, 33; cf. 4:11–12; 1 Cor 2:9–16; Gal 4:9), and provides hope of rising from the dead (Mark 5:41–42; cf. Rom 6:5, 8).

6. Ritual, Immersion, and Healing Audience Perception in Mark

Markan depictions of Jesus's healing of sight (Mark 8:22–26; 10:46–52) and hearing (7:31–37; 9:14–29) also include details that evoke ritual acts in ways that are conducive to audience immersion. As in the emphasis on what Jesus sees and hears in his baptism (1:10–11) and the perspective of those Jesus heals in Mark 5, the Gospel of Mark portrays visual and auditory perception throughout in thematized ways connected to understanding Jesus and his message (4:11–12, 21–25) (see Lawrence 2011; Marcus 1984). In Mark, the disciples misunderstand Jesus, resulting in Jesus questioning their understanding, asking, "Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὦτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε; καὶ οὐ μνημονεύετε, 8:18; cf. 4:12; Isa 6:9), and "Do you not yet understand?" (οὔπω συνίετε, Mark 8:21b). In this context, the stories of Jesus's restoration of visual and auditory perception, specifically the immersive narration of language and bodily movements associated with baptism, suggest that the ritual elements of these narratives facilitate the audience associating certain acts in baptismal rites with illuminated perception.

Each of the scenes of Jesus's healing sight and hearing uses several of the features Allan (2022) characterizes as conducive to audience immersion. The narrator focuses on spatial

details that lend verisimilitude to the narratives, in reference to the setting (e.g., "towards the Sea of Galilee", 7:31; "away from the crowd, alone", 7:33; "in Bethsaida (. . .) he led him out of the village", 8:22–23; "falling upon the ground, he rolled around", 9:20; "leaving Jericho (. . .) sitting beside the roadside", 10:46). The scenes all include "experientially rich" sensorimotor details (Allan 2022, p. 276), such as where Jesus "put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven he sighed" (7:33b–34a), Jesus leading the blind man of Bethsaida by the hand and applying touch and saliva to his head (8:23) and touching him a second time (8:25), Jesus taking the demon-possessed boy by the hand (9:27) after he was convulsing and rolling on the ground (9:20, 26), and Bartimaeus "throwing off his cloak, leaping up" (10:50). Each story uses a slow narrative pace and the absence of deviations from chronological order, focusing attention on the scene without intrusive scene-external narration or references to the outside world.

The narration of these healings includes elements that Allan describes as "[giving] rise to an affective response" (Allan 2022, p. 277) from the audience. Between the request for healing in 7:32 and the description of the man's healed state in 7:35, Jesus's actions in 7:33 and his prayer-oriented gestures and speech in 7:34 create suspense. Furthermore, the description of the audience as "overabundantly amazed" (ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο) and their response, "He has done all things well: He even makes the deaf to hear and the unspeaking to speak" (7:37) further invite the emotional involvement of the reading audience (Marcus 2000, p. 480; Hartvigsen 2012, p. 294). The two-stage healing of Mark 8:23–25 engenders curiosity and suspense, related to the nature of Jesus's healing power and meaning of the person's response, "I see (βλέπω) people that I perceive (ὁρῶ) as trees walking" (8:24b). These "plot-driven emotions" (Allan 2022, p. 277) can engage the audience's emotional involvement in the characters, in vicarious identification with the event, and in the development of the plot. The longest of these narratives, the healing of a boy with a spirit in Mark 9:14–29, has the highest number of emotionally evocative elements, including the desperation of the father's requests (9:18, 21–22, 24), the violence of the boy's convulsions (9:18, 20, 26), Jesus's strong responses to the father and the spirit (9:19, 23, 25), and the disciples' inability and lack of understanding (9:18, 28–29). Similarly, the persistence and volume of Bartimaeus (10:47–48) and his vivid response, "leaping up" (ἀναπηδάω, 10:50), gives emotional depth to the scene (so too, Hartvigsen 2012, p. 382).

As in the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11), the narration of character perspectives in these healing scenes is particularly conducive to audience immersion in the narrative. Allan lists "scene-internal" narration, "a shift to direct speech, dialogue, or free indirect speech" as aspects of immersive narrations of perspective (Allan 2022, p. 227). This is apparent in the shift from the scene-setting narration in Mark 7:31–32 to the "private" setting in which Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears, spits, and touches his tongue (7:33). As in the baptism of Jesus, the narrator then describes Jesus's perspective, "looking up into heaven" (ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν, 7:34a, see also 6:41), followed by Jesus's sigh and use of a command that the narrator reports and translates from Aramaic "'Ephphatha', that is, 'be opened'" (7:34b). While this use of Aramaic may lend immersive verisimilitude to the narration (as described in Allan 2020, p. 18; see also Hartvigsen 2012, p. 293), this direct speech and the narrator's use of "an embedded focalizer" is a specifically immersive mode of narration (Allan 2022, p. 227). In this first healing story, as in the baptism of Jesus, the narrator provides the audience with Jesus's perspective, looking up into heaven, contributing a sense of immersion in Jesus's apocalyptic experience (see Lincicum 2015).

A similar but more complex set of perspective shifts in Mark 9:14–29 create a rich tapestry of immersive tropes for the audience to experience. The Markan narrator begins from the perspective of Jesus, Peter, James, and John, descending the mount of Transfiguration to encounter the other disciples and the crowd, "And coming to the disciples, [Jesus, Peter, James, and John (cf. 9:2, 9)] saw (εἶδον) a great crowd around them" (9:14a). The focus quickly shifts to the perspective and awe of the crowd, "And immediately all the crowd, seeing (ἰδόντες) him, were overcome with awe" (9:15a). The following narration in 9:16–20 does not directly focalize any one character's perspective, but the narrator re-

lays direct dialogue between Jesus and the tormented boy's father (9:16–18) and Jesus's rhetorical speech to the crowd (cf. αὐτοῖς, 9:19), both conducive to audience immersion (Allan 2022, p. 277). Sandwiched between this immersive dialogue and its continuation in 9:21–24, the narrator introduces a surprising shift to the perspective of the unclean spirit: "And seeing [Jesus] (ἰδὼν αὐτόν), the spirit immediately convulsed [the boy]" (9:20a). The story's turning point comes with a shift to Jesus's perspective when "Jesus, seeing (ἰδών) that a crowd was running together" rebukes the spirit (9:25a). The narrator's use of the ὁράω-εἶδον verb complex throughout this passage, akin to Jesus's vision of the torn heavens (εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανούς, 1:10b), conveys a sense of spiritual perception, as characterized in contrast between βλέπω and ὁράω in 4:12 (Marcus 1984, pp. 570–72; Hilgert 1996, p. 187; see also Mark 5:6, 14, 16, 22; 6:33, 49–50; 9:1, 8; 13:26, 29; 14:62; 15:39).

Thus, coming to the stories of Jesus's restoration of characters' sight, there is reason to question whether the narrator uses embedded focalization through the sight and hearing of healed characters to provoke audience identification with those Jesus heals in Mark 8:22–26 and 10:46–52 as models for transformed spiritual perception, in contrast to the disciples (8:17–21; cf. 4:10–12; 8:31–33; see Malbon 1984, p. 373; Marcus 2009, p. 600). In Mark 8:22–26, the only embedded focalization in the scene takes place after Jesus's manual application of saliva on the man: "And looking up (ἀναβλέψας), he said, 'I see (βλέπω) people that I perceive (ὁρῶ) as trees walking'" (8:24). Jesus's ritualized actions bring about the perspective shift the audience experiences with the healed man. The man mirrors Jesus's heavenward sight from 7:34, then progresses from mere sight to more perceptive vision (Marcus 2009, pp. 599–601; Lohmeyer 1963, p. 159; Best 1981, pp. 134–39). This progression continues after the second application of Jesus's hands, where the narrator describes the full restoration of the man's sight (ἀποκαθίστημι) with two words for seeing that convey penetrating vision (διαβλέπω) that brings about the fully perceptive sight of "all things clearly" (ἐνέβλεπεν τηλαυγῶς ἅπαντα, 8:25; see Marcus 1999). Similarly, in Mark 10:46–52, the narrator focalizes the scene through Bartimaeus's sense of hearing: "And hearing that it is Jesus the Nazarene, he began to call out and to say, 'Son of David, have mercy upon me'" (10:47). Bartimaeus's hearing produces faith that leads to his regaining sight (Lawrence 2011, pp. 391–93), again using the same word to describe Jesus's look to the heavens (ἀναβλέπω, 10:51, 52; so too, Hilgert 1996, p. 191; Palachuvattil 2002, p. 30; Marcus 2009, p. 594). As examples of healed perception conveyed through the embedded focalization of their sight and hearing, the man in Bethsaida and Bartimaeus become models for the audience to be immersed in the experience of Jesus's transformation of their perception.

Several of these immersive elements focus on ritual action. The description of Jesus's sensorimotor movements, specifically related to touch, the application of saliva, and grasping the hands of those he heals, suggest a relation to healing rites, anointing, and possible baptismal rituals practiced in early Christianity. In Mark 8:22–26, as in 7:31–37, Jesus accomplishes healing through the application of saliva and touch together (so too, Standaert 2010a, pp. 595–96). This combination of touch with the application of liquid to the head suggests a reference to an anointing ritual that conveys the power of the Spirit (see Marcus 2000, pp. 473–74). Elsewhere, the narration of touch correlates with those who understand Jesus's power in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 6:5, 13 places Jesus's hand-laying in parallel with his empowerment of the disciples to anoint, suggesting an analogy between these ritual practices in the Markan story world (*pace* Standaert 2010b, pp. 449–50; France 2002, pp. 250–51). Overall, the Gospel contains more instances involving the laying on, or touch, of Jesus's hands in acts of healing (Mark 1:31, 41; 5:23, 41 (cf. 5:27–32); 6:5 (cf. 6:2); 7:32–33; 8:23, 25; 9:27) and blessing (10:16) than the other synoptics (see note 2 below). As a gospel that begins with the announcement of Jesus as the Anointed One (χριστός, Mark 1:1) who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:8), which Paul associates with anointing (2 Cor 1:21–22; cf. Mark 1:10) and Acts attributes to the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17; 19:5-6), there is reason to surmise that Mark portrays Jesus's touch as a vehicle for spiritual anointing in baptism (see Jensen 2012, p. 93). The narrator puts several of the

Gospel's turning points in the context of anointings (1:1–11 (e.g., 1:1, 10); 8:22–30; 14:3–9; 16:1–8). Anointing and touch signify the disclosure of Jesus's identity and mission (see Wheatley 2023). This association between touch, anointing, and spiritual perception is clear in the context around Mark 8:22–26, where Jesus's two-stage healing of a man's sight occurs between his implication of the disciples' spiritual blindness (8:17–21) and Peter's partial perception of Jesus as the Anointed One (8:27–30 (χριστός, 8:29), cf. 8:32–33).

The correlation of immersive narration and detailed description of ritual actions in these passages has the potential to "activate experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schemas/frames or personal memories" (Allan 2022, p. 276) in the audience. Attention to the use of Jesus's hands and saliva in the first three healing stories (Mark 7:31–37; 8:22–26; 9:14–29) correlate to ritual practices associated with baptism in Mark 1:1–15 and in early Christianity (see Marcus 2000, pp. 476–81). In Mark 10:46–52, the inclusion of details regarding the command for Bartimaeus to rise (ἐγείρω, 10:49; cf. Rom 6:4), the casting off of Bartimaeus's garment (ἱμάτιον, Mark 10:50; cf. 14:51–52; Gal 3:27;) (see Jensen 2012, pp. 167–72), the statement "your faith has saved you" (Mark 10:52b; cf. 5:34), and reference to following Jesus "on the way" (10:52c; cf. Acts 9:17–18) all correlate to early descriptions of baptism as spiritual illumination (see Marcus 2009, pp. 760, 765–66). Further emphasis on hearing that leads to illumination through faith (10:47, 52) recalls Paul's language about how the Galatians "received the Spirit (. . .) through the hearing of faith" (τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε (. . .) ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως, Gal 3:2b), which culminates in baptismal reception of the Spirit (Gal 3:25–4:7). The Markan narrator presents Jesus characterizing baptism in reference to death just before healing Bartimaeus (Mark 10:38–39; cf. Rom 6:3–5; 8:15–17). For baptized audience members, these immersive narrative reminiscences of baptism activate personal memories of baptism and reinforce baptism as spiritual illumination joining them to Jesus in the way of his death and resurrection. These ritual details provide bridges between the narrative text and the audience's experience of the passage.

7. Conclusions

In summary, examining how the narration of Jesus's baptism and other baptism-like narratives in the Gospel of Mark facilitate audience immersion shows how audience experiences of rituals and the narration of ritual acts aid vivid audience experiences of the text. Consideration of known community ritual practices can supplement other sociocultural factors to be weighed in undertaking audience-oriented readings of Mark. The cognitive basis of immersion theory and the identification of narrative features that facilitate audience immersion allows scholars of ancient texts to analyze elements of texts that remain accessible to present-day scholarship to assess their immersive effect. Correlating these texts with historical evidence of coeval identity-forming practices of ancient reading communities, such as the depiction of baptism in the Pauline epistles and Mark 1:9–11, provides a text-oriented analysis with audience-oriented results that obviate hypothetical appeals to the performance of the ritual in the context of the reading event. The socio-cognitive basis of this reading strategy allows greater access to seemingly "transient" aspects of the audience experience of Mark as publicly read without abandoning the clear gains of emphasizing the "proximate, corporate (. . .) perceptive, and participatory" (Iverson 2021, p. 52) aspects of public reading events. Indeed, Iverson's (*ibid.*) emphasis on the "corporate", "perceptive, and participatory" elements of performance overlap with emphasis on shifts of perspective and experientially rich details that Allan (2022, pp. 276–77) uses to characterize immersive narration.

As Risto Uro has shown, rituals, in their execution, can "convey religious knowledge" and "facilitate the *transmission* of religious traditions" (Uro 2016, pp. 67–68, emphasis original). However, the foregoing study of the narration of Jesus's baptism and baptism-like healing stories in Mark shows that the *memory* of the experience of rituals, long after their execution, remains as a rich schema that narrators can continue using to evoke, reinforce, and—one might postulate—even reshape religious knowledge and the transmission of traditions. Through the use of immersive narration, including sensorimotor details related

to memories of baptism, such as passage through or proximity to water (Mark 1:9; 5:1, 21; 7:31; 8:22 (cf. 8:13)), the application of hands or liquid to the head, body, or garment (5:23, 27–28, 30; 7:32–33; 8:22–25), grasping of the hand (5:41; 9:27), changing garments (5:15; 10:50), and use of ritualized forms of speech (son/daughter, 1:11; 5:34 (cf. 5:23, 35); 9:17; 10:46–48; "Talitha cum", 5:41; "Ephphatha", 7:34; "your faith has saved you", 5:34; 10:52), the narrator of Mark enables "an embodied mental simulation (. . .) of the sights, sounds, touches, smells, emotions, and actions in the described scene" (Allan 2022, p. 276) related to the memory of baptism. The Markan narrator's use of shifts to internalized perception in key moments (1:10; 5:6, 20, 27, 29–30, 33; 7:34; 8:24–25; 9:20, 25; 10:47) intensifies the immersive effect, aiding audience identification with Jesus and characters whose healing transforms their perspective. Further use of emotion-arousing language to "[steer] the recipient's emotional evaluation of the characters (. . .) arousing feelings of identification (. . .) or by engendering plot-driven emotions" (Allan 2022, p. 277), engages the audience with developments in the characters and story, modeling their faith, their perception of Jesus and his power, and their transformation.

Admittedly, not all of the ritually tinged actions enumerated above are exclusive to baptism or observable in Paul's descriptions of baptism or in Jesus's baptism in Mark 1:9–11. However, the resonance of language and actions observable in Mark 1:9–11 or Paul's interpretations of baptism, such as sonship (Mark 1:11; Gal 3:26; 4:5–6; Rom 8:14–16), the gift of the Spirit as an anointing (2 Cor 1:21) that testifies to divine sonship (Mark 1:10; Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15–16), and identification with Jesus in baptism (Gal 4:4–7 (cf. Gal 2:19–20); Rom 6:3–5; 8:17), and water strongly suggests their baptismal association in the healing scenes examined above. If arguments for the representation of baptism in the healing scenes analyzed above are convincing, there is reason to consider that the remainder of the actions resembling later forms of baptismal hand-laying or evocative of baptismal exorcisms or healing formulas may be common to baptism more broadly, as in Acts and other early Christian literature (see Wheatley 2023). Alternatively, some of these scenes may describe baptismal practices unique to Markan circles or Jesus traditions ripe for baptismal re-contextualization. Conversely, some of these possible baptismal links could be from Jesus traditions of these healing stories, absent any baptismal signification.

Nevertheless, the overall picture presents related actions and language that correlate strongly with early Christian baptism. The narrator links audience members' memories of baptism with the narration of Jesus's own perception of receiving the Spirit, his attestation of divine sonship, and the characters' transformation into people with faith to perceive their own salvation through Jesus's ongoing work by the Spirit. By bridging the audience's experience of baptism with the narration of Jesus's baptism and healing stories in Mark, the narrator reinforces themes in the text that cohere with interpretations of the baptismal ritual current at the time of the Gospel's composition: Jesus "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8), and the audience can hope to receive transformed perception that will reassure them of his presence as they follow him (cf. 8:34; 10:52) and proclaim the gospel in their contexts (5:20), for "there, you will see him" (Mark 16:7). The ritual bridge between the public reading of the text and the text itself allows examination of narrative features of the text to illuminate aspects of audience experience in a way that foregoes the conjecture of further performative actions or rituals being performed in the immediate context of the reading event.

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Notes

[1] In addition to these, the Gospel depicts other rituals throughout, including Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9), exorcisms (e.g., 1:21–28; 5:8–13), anointings (e.g., 6:13; 14:3; cf. 8:23), a ritual meal (14:16–26), and burial practices (15:46–16:1; cf. 14:8). Following Risto Uro, I define these actions, the performance of healing "rites", and the discussion of "ritual" practices under the general term "ritual" to refer to "particular ritual enactments located at specific times and places" (Uro 2016, p. 6, n. 1; cf. Grimes 2014, pp. 192–93), in early Jewish and Christian contexts typically comprising "death, burial" and related practices, "purification, conflict resolution, and forgiveness", and "meal practices" (Uro 2016, p. 6, n. 2).

[2] To take hand-laying as an example, assuming Markan priority, Matthew omits most of Mark's references to hand-laying, and those the evangelist includes (Matt 8:15; 9:18; 19:13, 15) are taken from Mark (1:31; 5:23; 10:16, respectively). Despite the prevalence of hand-laying in Acts, Luke has only one non-Markan example of the practice (Luke 13:13). The other two instances of hand-laying in Luke (Luke 4:40; 5:13) come from Markan usage. In the first (Luke 4:40) the evangelist conflates Mark 1:32–34 with Mark 6:5, and in the second (Luke 5:13), Luke repeats Mark 1:41.

[3] Due to the contested authorship and dating of 1 Peter and James, this methodology does not treat 1 Pet 3:18–22 or James 5:15 as reliably datable prior to the composition of Mark to attest to pre-Markan baptismal or anointing practices. See Allison (2013, pp. 13–18) and Davids (2014, pp. 41, 110–12).

[4] Author's translation. So throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

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