

Sunday 21 February is the First Sunday of Lent The Gospel Reading is Mark 1:9-15, as follows

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven. 'You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness for forty days tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him,

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵And saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near: repent and believe in the good news.

And now suddenly everything has changed. John has been proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, to which crowds of people responded by lining up at the river Jordan. With a foretaste of humility, Jesus offers himself along with the others.

This leads immediately to a number of events. Firstly, he is declared publicly to be The Son of God and, secondly, as such is driven by The Spirit of God out into the wilderness. There he remains for forty days, a period that we now recognise as Lent.

Lent is a time for a spiritual stocktake. Temptation was as real to Jesus as it is to us. He will have been familiar with the family problems of his ancestor David. As part of my Bible Guidelines, I have been reading the 2nd Book of Samuel. A more dreadful catalogue of sins would be difficult to compile. But David repented and was forgiven. As established king, approved by God, his son Solomon was to build the Jerusalem temple.

So what of our stocktake? I think we must realise that temptation is as real as ever. Under the Covid regime, it has appeared in many new forms. We do well to try to respect the greatest of all commandments 'Love God and your neighbour as yourself'.

And now, let us pray.

We ask you Lord to be with those sick with Covid, also with those trying to look after them, those preparing, distributing and administering appropriate vaccines and those trying to put in place regimes to end the pandemic. We ask that the divine love may be victorious over all evil in the world. When human authority leads people astray and power is wrongly used, may the power of Christ drive away temptation and cleanse the nations with the sacred water of his baptism. May these our prayers be acceptable in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Beloved.

With my love and every good wish,

Alec.