



## Church at Home

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021**

### **The First Sunday of Lent**

‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;  
repent, and believe in the good news’ Mark 1:15

Welcome to Lent 2021. Last week, Ash Wednesday marked the start of our journey towards the mystery of Easter for which we prepare during these following six weeks. It is traditionally a time for fasting and repentance – a time to get ready to re-engage with the heart of our faith at the cross and the open tomb.

Ashes are a biblical symbol of repentance but interestingly they are also used as a fertiliser for new growth. Our saying sorry to God isn't about beating ourselves up but rather it is an honest recognition that the ground of our lives needs turning over in order to receive the seed of the gospel which will produce that new growth in our lives. And our fasting isn't about a religious ritual for its own sake but rather a sign that we are choosing to give our attention to what matters, to invest our time differently, whether in prayer or in acts of generosity and goodwill. I wonder what you have chosen to do or not to do this Lent to help you get ready to celebrate Easter? When

Jesus began his ministry, he called people to get ready, to make a change in their thinking and their behaviour so that they could encounter the Kingdom of God here and now. As we begin to catch a glimpse of the roadmap out of this pandemic, I wonder how we can get ready to live life differently in the future, for the sake of our neighbours and the world we are called to care for?



### **The Bible readings for this Sunday:**

**[Genesis 9:8-17](#)** - God gives Noah and his family the sign of the rainbow to mark his unbreakable commitment of love to them and to the world. Rainbows of hope are still on many windows across the land, drawn in hope during this pandemic. *I wonder what promises they might now symbolise regarding the future?*

**[Psalm 25:1-10](#)** - This is the Psalmist's response to God's everlasting covenant, as he promises to live life according to God's laws of love and to follow God's ways. *I wonder what your response to God is this Lent?*

**[1 Peter 3:18-22](#)** - The apostle Peter reminds his readers of the new covenant we now have with God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as Noah and his family emerge to a new beginning out of the Ark, so we are given a new start having been rescued by Jesus. *I wonder what your baptism into Christ means for you each day?*

**[Mark 1:9-15](#)** - Mark describes the beginning of Jesus's ministry including his baptism, his temptations in the wilderness (which are a pattern for our 40 days of Lent), and then the message of good news that he brings. *I wonder how we as God's people can be good news for our country and our world at this time?*

### **Before we sing, read or pray**

Take a moment to settle yourself for prayer and worship. As you breathe in slowly, welcome the presence of Christ into your heart, mind and soul; as you breathe out slowly, let go of all those things that distract and disturb your life. God longs that we experience freedom from all that harms us. This why Christ came; this is why he chose to reject the self-seeking and selfish voices he heard in the desert and chose instead to go to the cross for us. Reflect on this amazing love, remembering the words of the Psalmist who wrote 'as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us'. Now, as you breathe in, say 'I am forgiven'; now, as you breathe out, say 'and I am loved forever'

**The Lord is here; God's Spirit is with us!**

## Suggested hymns:

[40 days and 40 nights](#)

[My hope is built on nothing less](#) (Cornerstone)

[God who made the earth](#)

[O love that will not let me go](#)

[In heavenly love abiding](#)

[Lord Jesus think of me](#)

[How great thou art](#)

[Take up your cross](#)

[Be still and know](#)



## First thoughts on today's Gospel

*Christ in the wilderness: The Scorpion by Stanley Spencer*

Mark devotes just one verse in today's gospel to describing the time Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted. The story of the Temptations is traditionally one on which the church often focuses at the beginning of Lent, which itself mirrors the 40 days that Jesus spent on his own choosing the way of the cross rather than any other to save the world. Three times the enemy tempts Christ, suggesting he should use magic, spectacle and military power to become the world's Messiah and each time Jesus says 'no' to these false routes to salvation; he quotes scriptures which reveal that God's priorities and God's ways of working are quite different. The choices that Christ makes here are in accordance with God's love and character. On behalf of all of us, he chooses God's way and so cancels out the false choices we have made ever since the Garden of Eden. God in human form made these choices and they weren't easy. In the wilderness Jesus chose the sort of Messiah he was to be, and he knew that it was going to cost him his life. God the Holy Spirit led God the Son into a godless place to face that choice. The great victory of Easter starts here in this place of desolation and aloneness. The outcome of the 40 days and nights determines the future of the whole universe and, having made the choices he did, we see them echoed and repeated again and again over the next three years of his ministry. Each Lent we are invited to join Jesus in the wilderness and choose life over death, blessing over curse and God's way not our own.

## For our prayers, let us remember:

- Any of our friends and neighbours who are facing difficult choices in their lives
- For teachers returning to school in this lockdown, managing their classes on line and by email.
- For those we know who are sick, at home or in hospital, and those whose mental health has suffered during this crisis
- For all health care professionals and the vaccination teams working so hard at this time
- For our local and national leaders as they work out the best way forward out of the restraints of this recent lockdown
- For particular items from the international news that God has put on your heart this morning.

Add any other people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord's Prayer**.

End your time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond.

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## Reflection on a painting

### Christ in the wilderness by Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoy - 1872



Kramskoy was one of 14 Russian art students who decided they would no longer paint the 'required' mythological subjects. Instead they wanted realism that related to everyday life. Some members of the group used their art to comment on Russian society. Ivan wanted to paint a Russian Christ who could reflect on the sorrow of his people; an ordinary working man who is a desolate figure amid a harsh stony landscape. Kramskoy wrote that there is a moment of choosing that comes to everyone and this is Christ's moment.

Most of the time in the gospels we read about Jesus with others - his disciples, the crowds and even his enemies. He travels in company and

lives in community. We do hear of his going off alone to pray but we aren't normally allowed to stay with him there in the narrative. In contrast, the wilderness temptations are recorded for us so we can be there with him. The writers of the gospel needed to let us in on this very personal and solitary time because it is for our good. It's almost as if the writers are saying that 'wilderness choosing' is not just an experience for Jesus but for us too. Each one of us must decide who comes first and what is most important in life. Each of us has to choose the way of the cross for ourselves.

I wonder what this painting says to you about aloneness?

I wonder how the silence of this painting relates to our choosing?

I wonder what the sadness in Christ's face tells us about God's love for the world and for each one of us?

I wonder how the emptiness of this place speaks to Christ's emptying of himself for our salvation? (see Philippians 2: 7ff)

I wonder what Christ is thinking about or what he is remembering as he sits alone?

I wonder how you can find space and time to meet with God in a similar, intimate aloneness and what God wants to say to you this Lent?

## Lent

Lent is a tree without blossom, without leaf,  
Barer than blackthorn in its winter sleep,  
All unadorned. Unlike Christmas which decrees  
The setting-up, the dressing-up of trees,  
Lent is a taking down, a stripping bare,  
A starkness after all has been withdrawn  
Of surplus and superfluous,  
Leaving no hiding-place, only an emptiness  
Between black branches, a most precious space  
Before the leaf, before the time of flowers;  
Lest we should see only the leaf, the flower,  
Lest we should miss the stars.

Jean M Watt



## Baptism

In the early church the main purpose of Lent was to prepare people for baptism, which was then performed during the Easter services. Even when the church no longer did this regularly, the basic meaning of Lent remained the same. **Easter is a return every year to our own baptism and Lent is a preparation for that return.** The new Rector for the Vale of Roding, Charlie Kosla, is now responsible for the Anglican churches in this area, reflects on 'baptism' in this week's Abridge Churches YouTube service

## For further reflection and activities for the whole family

[Here](#) is the story of Lent over 40 days

[Here](#) is a song about Lent

[Here](#) is a short film version of the Temptations (*Warning; a scary devil figure*)

### Questions on [the Gospel](#) to talk about together:

I wonder....

....why you think Jesus chose to be baptised?

....why it was important for Jesus to hear God's voice and see God's Spirit?

....why Jesus needed to spend so much time alone?

....what the devil was trying to tempt him to do?

....how the angels looked after Jesus?

### Visual aid:

To represent the three temptations, collect a small pile of stones, build a tower from bricks and find a toy globe. Use these as the focus for conversations about this part of the story.

### Prayer idea:

Use your visual aids for the three temptations for your prayers, focusing on those who are hungry in the world; those who are facing big decisions and don't know what to do; and those caught up in fighting and war in different parts of the world. Ask God to show us and others the right way to go and how to avoid the temptations to do things that are just a quick fix, could lead to pride or involve compromising with evil.

### Here is a picture to decorate as you talk about this story

