



PARISH OF FINCHAMPSTEAD  
AND CALIFORNIA

WEEK 1 – FROM 9 MARCH 2014

LENT WELL SPENT  
*... in the Wilderness*

**Bible reading – Matthew 4. 1-11 (NRSVA)**

**4** <sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' <sup>4</sup> But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

**Context**

Jesus has just been baptised by John and has heard God's voice say, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' (3.17)

The account of the Temptation resonates with ideas from the Old Testament, particularly the role of the serpent in the Adam and Eve narrative (Genesis 2-3), and the experience of the Jewish nation during its 40 years of wandering in the wilderness before reaching the Promised Land (from Exodus 15 onwards).

**Questions on the Bible reading**

1 How significant is it that the Temptation of Jesus follows immediately on his Baptism? What is God's role in this through the Holy Spirit (v1) and the angels (v11)? What is the Temptation for?

2 What do the three separate tests mean? (Note that Jesus later in his ministry demonstrated the kinds of powers the Devil offered him – see Matthew 14.13-21; 21.12-17; Philippians 2.9-11)

3 Why is the Devil given a personal identity? How does this help or hinder our understanding of what was going on?

4 Why does Jesus quote Scripture (always), and the Devil also (sometimes)?

5 When the Devil leaves (v10), does this imply that Jesus will never be tempted again, or that he will never be tempted again *in this way*, or that the Devil is gone for now and will be back? (Matthew 16. 15-23 and Hebrews 4.15 may help).

### **Questions about ourselves**

6 Where is our wilderness? Is it outside us (a real location), or inside us (an attitude or state of mind, for example separation from God)? What does it feel like? How might we find the way back?

7 How aware are we of being tempted – or as other translations put it – of being tested? How far does it help or hinder us to think of a physical devil rather than more generalised evil?

8 What kinds of temptations are we particularly prone to? Do we recognize them as such? Are we honest about them?

9 To what extent is our relationship with God helpful in addressing such issues? What other ways do we use?

10 How do we use the Bible to help resolve problems in our lives? How do we distinguish good use (like Jesus') from bad use (like the Devil's)?

11 In what ways might we use Jesus' experience to help us confront our own wilderness?

12 Who are the angels God has sent to wait on us?

### **Concluding Reflections**

'The devil can only be a parasite, which means that the devil is only as strong as the one he tempts.' *Stanley Hauerwas*

'Accept your wilderness. From the story of the Son of Man realize what your Lent really means ... you'll find moments when giving for love's sake really satisfies you, really makes you feel alive and in contact. ... Lent, we discover, is Easter in disguise.' *H.A. Williams*