



Parish of Finchampstead and California

week 1 – from 22 February 2015

LENT WELL SPENT ... in the Name of Jesus: Son of God

Gospel reading – Luke 4. 1-15 (NRSVA)

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³ The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' ⁴ Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'"

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' ⁸ Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."'"

⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", ¹¹ and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' ¹² Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Context

Jesus has just been baptised by John, the Holy Spirit has descended on him and he has heard God's voice say, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' (3.21-22)

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).

In the OT, the description *Son of God* or *children of God* is applied to the whole Jewish people (eg Exodus 4.22-23; Hosea 11.1; Isaiah 45.11), and to their kings (eg 2 Samuel 7.14, Psalm 2.7). There are a few OT references to God as Father but the Jewish writers seemed keen to distinguish the covenant relationship between God and his people, however close, from the procreative interventions of the gods of the surrounding nations. In the Greek world *sons of god(s)* could be not only rulers but anyone perceived to have some kind of divine power, for example miracle-workers; there was little exclusivity to the description, which distinguished it sharply from the Jewish tradition and even more strongly later from the Christian tradition.

In the NT there is a distinction between Jesus as Son of God, in an entirely new and intimate relationship with God the Father (predicated in at least Matthew and Luke on the unprecedented circumstances of his conception and birth), and the relationship of those who become children of God through faith in Jesus. See eg Paul in Galatians 4.5-6; Romans 8.14-17 and John in his Gospel (ch 1.12-14). Mark, the earliest of the Gospel writers, in his opening verse (1.1) takes as a given Jesus' implied claim to be the Son of God (eg Mark 12.1-11, the parable of the tenants, and 13.32) and those of the 'outside' witnesses - the evil spirits (3.11; 5.7) and the Roman centurion (15.39).

Finally Jesus as Son of God has clearly been an important affirmation of faith since the earliest days of the Christian church - see eg 1 John 4.15; Hebrews 4.14, Romans 1.3-4.

Questions on the Bible reading and background

1 As God's Son, why did Jesus need to be baptised by John? In what ways do you imagine that God was well-pleased?

2 Why does the Temptation of Jesus follow immediately on his Baptism? What is the relationship between baptism and temptation? What is the Temptation for?

3 What do the three separate tests mean? (Note that Jesus later in his ministry demonstrated the kinds of powers the Devil offered him – see Mark 6.32-44; Philippians 2.9-11; Mark 11.15-18.)

4 In what ways is it significant that the Devil prefaces two of his tests with *If you are the Son of God ...?*

5 How significant is it that Jesus confronts a personal devil rather than simply himself or evil in a more general sense?

6 What can we learn from Jesus' reliance on Scripture, and the Devil's misuse of it?

7 When is *the opportune time* (v13) for the Devil to test Jesus again? (Mark 8.13 and 14.35-36 are two possibilities; Hebrews 4.15 suggests a more general answer.)

Questions about ourselves

8 At his baptism, God affirmed Jesus as his Son. Immediately Jesus was put to the test as God's Son. If we take God's promises seriously we can claim to be children of God because of Jesus. In what ways do we receive affirmation? And in what ways can we expect to be tested as God's children? What protection do we have and what resources can we call on?

9 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?

10 When and how are we most at risk of the Devil's attacks?

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

12 Are we as clear as Jesus was about the difference between right and wrong? (We'll be exploring this further in this week's Lent Lecture - see below.)

Concluding Reflections

Jesus 'not only spoke like 'the Son' but also acted like 'the Son' in knowing and revealing the truth about God, in changing the divine law, in forgiving sins, in being the one through whom others could become children of God, and in acting with total obedience as the agent for God's final kingdom.'

Gerald O'Collins

'Jesus is the Son of God not as a miracle worker, but in the obedient fulfilment of his task - precisely his task of suffering.'

Oscar Cullmann

Lent Lecture - Tuesday 24 February

Right and Wrong in the Occupied West Bank – a presentation by **Ken Perrett**. Ken is a longstanding member and former churchwarden of St John the Baptist Crowthorne. Following an earlier pilgrimage trip to the Holy Land, he spent two months last year living with a Palestinian family in Bethlehem. His presentation will be based on his experiences and reflections.

Some of us have had the opportunity to hear Ken speak and are keen to hear him again, even though the issues he addresses are deep-seated and apparently intractable.

We are planning to have available Fairtrade products from West Bank producers.

Tea and coffee will be available in St James' Church Centre from 7.45 and the Lecture will start in the church (this week only) at 8.

Other Lent Activities

Monday morning 9-10 in Church - Lent prayer (silent prayer - come and go as you please).

Monday afternoon 2-3 (SJCC) - an opportunity to explore the weekly theme in more depth.