

Lent 1- Hebrews Chapter 4, verses 14 – 16 and Mark Chapter 1, verses 9 – 13:-

The theme for the First Sunday in Lent is traditionally ‘The Temptations of Christ’. As vulnerable members of humanity we need the reassurance of our risen, ascended, Lord Jesus Christ as we face the temptations common to all. The reading from Hebrews should give us confidence that we have indeed “*a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God*”.

Note that Mark omits any details of the temptations, only commenting that Jesus was “*tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him*”. The ministry of the angels came after the temptations were ended (Matthew chapter 4 verse 11) and after the devil “*departed from him until a more opportune time*” (Luke chapter 4, verse 13). Mark also refers to the Holy Spirit ‘driving’ Jesus out into the wilderness (chapter 1, verse 12). The compulsion for isolation came from the Godhead. Satan – the ‘Tempter’, the ‘Accuser’, took advantage of the isolation and the ‘wildness’ of the situation to tempt the Lord Jesus with worldly good things! - ‘Food’, ‘Fame’ and ‘Power’. It is worth looking at these in more detail during this time of Lent in preparation for Easter.

“He fasted forty days and forty nights and afterward he was hungry” - Matthew chapter 4, verse 2.

Of course, the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord of creation (Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 – 16) could make as much bread as he wanted. The deepest longings of the human heart can never be satisfied with material things. Notice that the Lord Jesus does not argue with Satan. He simply quotes from Scripture – the Word of God. Here the reply is from Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 3.

It is worth reflecting on the words in Deuteronomy chapter 8, verses 2 - 3 and comparing the wilderness experience of the Israelites with that of the Lord Jesus Christ. The giving of manna in the wilderness was held to be an example of the loving care of the Lord God for his people. In the New Testament the Lord Jesus points to himself as the spiritual manna come down from heaven. Notice that in saying “*he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life*” he follows it up a few verses later with “*It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life*”. - Gospel of John chapter 6, verses 54 and 63.

In the struggle of humankind for material goods - ‘keeping up with the neighbours’ attitude – we and they can miss out on the spiritual blessings of dependence on the Lord God.

After the wilderness experience of the Lord Jesus his need was for the assurance given by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Luke picks up this point at the end of the wilderness experience “*Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee.*” Luke chapter 4, verse 14.

Prayer during Lent:-

Psalm 40 can be used as a basis for prayer. Thanksgiving for past mercies and a plea for the Lord’s help at this time in both our personal lives and the spiritual life of the church and nation. Remember the prophecy of Amos chapter 8, verse 11 -

“Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord”

*Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim though this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore
feed me now and evermore.*

William Williams 1745

