

# *PREGO EXTRA*

Background notes  
for the Gospels of Lent  
weeks 1, 2 & 3  
Year B 2012



ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH  
IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

**SAINT BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM**

## 1st Sunday of Lent Mark 1: 12-15

Traditionally the 1st Sunday of Lent reflects on the Temptations of the Lord. Mark's account of this episode is very short. It is sometimes difficult not to bring to mind Matthew's version which we read last year or Luke's version which we read two years ago, yet Mark's account is distinctive, short and pithy.

### The Spirit drove Jesus out

The Greek word translated here by "driving" implies a violent action. We might say that Jesus felt a strong psychological urge to go into the desert.



Jewish belief of the time was that at the end of time the Evil Spirit would finally be conquered in a great fight. The temptations could be seen as a picture of Jesus' saving the world, winning the

challenge Satan put to him.

### The wilderness

In people's mind, the wilderness was where the evil spirits lived. It is also a place of self-discovery and Jesus is there alone. Although only suggested here, Mark will mention Jesus' loneliness throughout his Gospel.

### Forty days

Forty is a special number which would have had immediate connotations to Mark's readers. The people of Israel spent forty years in the desert. (Deuteronomy 2:7). It can also simply mean a long period.

### Tempted by Satan

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses explains to the people why Yahweh led them for forty years in the wilderness: "...to humble you, to test you, to know your inmost heart". (8: 2)

In the same way, Jesus is tempted/tested by Satan. Originally Satan is a Hebrew word meaning adversary, tempter.

## Stop turning my Father's house into a market

Contrary to the other gospels writers, John here is not complaining about unfair trading but about trading in that particular place. In objecting to commerce taking place in this courtyard, Jesus is indicating that this area is God's house too. Jews and Gentiles are equal in God's eyes; this was an important notion for the early Church.



Jesus begins to reveal his true identity as the Messiah by calling the Temple **MY Father's** house. He has a special relationship with God.

### His disciples remembered the word of Scripture

The quote is from Psalm 69:9. We see here an example of the disciples understanding and belief gradually unfolding with the help of Scripture.

Although the disciples were present, there is often a certain delay before they realise the full import of what they have witnessed.

### What sign can you show us?

John's Gospel emphasises signs rather than miracles. The Jews want a sign to justify his authority. Jesus' answer refers to his death and resurrection as the ultimate sign but the Jews misunderstand his answer.

This is a common device in John's gospel.

Misunderstandings are common (Nicodemus 3:4 and the woman at the well 4:11 for example)

### Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up.

At the time of writing this Gospel, the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed for several decades. Jesus is the new Temple; John always writes in the light of Jesus' resurrection.

### The cleansing of the Temple

This week's gospel reading comes from John. It relates an episode which is also found in Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospels.

However, contrary to these other writers, John situates the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, just after the miracle at Cana.

What seems to matter to John is not so much when the event took place as its significance for his first century readers.

#### Just before the Jewish Passover

Jewish feasts are given prominence in John's Gospel, they exemplify institutions before the coming of Christ. Many Jews would converge to the Temple from far and wide and so there would have been an increase in the number of people looking to buy animals for sacrificial purposes.

#### People selling cattle, sheep and pigeons

Pilgrims were glad of this service which avoided having to travel with animals in tow.



#### Money changers at their counters

Roman and Greek coinage which had the face of the Emperor engraved on it were not allowed by the Jewish authorities. Only half shekels from the Tyre region which were made of pure silver and had no facial representation were acceptable currency. This accounts for the presence of money changers.

#### The Jerusalem Temple

The scene takes place not in the main sanctuary where only Jews could go but in a courtyard outside of it: the "Court of the Gentiles".

We remember Jesus rebuking Peter when he tried to remonstrate with him about the inevitability of his passion: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8: 33)

#### Wild beasts

Only Mark mentions them. Scholars see a link between these animals and the idyllic picture of a world at peace painted by Isaiah (11-6). Jesus too is not harmed by them; it is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God.



#### Angels

The word originally means Messenger. God never abandons his faithful.

#### Jesus went into Galilee



Jesus' Galilean ministry is central to Mark's gospel. It is also in Galilee that the post resurrection appearances occur. It would seem that it is also the region where Mark expected the end of time to occur as is implied in the following verses. (14-15)

#### The time has come

These verses were read on 3rd Sunday of Ordinary time (See January Prego Extra) They are the first words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

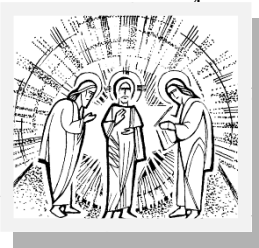
#### Believe the good news

It is possible that Jesus himself talked about his message as the Good News. He would have been very familiar with the words of Isaiah: "He has sent me to bring good news to the poor" (Isaiah 61: 1) However, it may also have been a common term in Christian circles of the time. Paul also uses the same expression in his letters: "I was so determined to safeguard for you the true meaning of the Good News..." (Galatians 2: 5)

## 2nd Sunday of Lent Mark 9: 2-10 The Transfiguration

This episode begins the second half of Mark's Gospel.

It is also recorded in Matthew 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36 and Peter gives an eye witness account of the scene in his second letter (2Peter 1:16-18).



The transfiguration took place about a week after Jesus spoke to the disciples about his passion and death (Mark 8:27-9:1).

This is one of the most precise time references in the Gospel. The disciples are still shaken by what they have heard, and do not understand.

### **Peter, James and John.**

Jesus took only the closest of his disciples to the mountain, those who would later have important roles in the early Church (Acts 3-4; 12:2)

The place of the Transfiguration has traditionally been identified with Mount Tabor in Galilee, and the day on which it is celebrated is referred to as the *Taborion* by the Eastern Churches.

However it is much more likely that this event took place on Mount Hermon, a higher mountain in the region of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus had been travelling with his disciples. (Mark 8:27)

In the Gospels a mountain is often the setting for revelation and for key events in the life of Jesus, (Mark 3:13; 13:3; 14:26).

### **His clothes became dazzlingly white.**

Often in scripture white clothing signifies the holiness that can only come from God. (Dan. 7:9, Mark 16:5).

The word Mark uses to describe Jesus' garments is *stilbein*, a word used to depict the gleam of burnished brass, gold, or polished steel, and also the golden glare of sunlight.

As scripture has said that at the end of time '...the virtuous will shine like the sun...' (Matt 13:43) Jesus' Transfiguration is seen as a foretelling of the resurrection of humanity.

### **Elijah appeared to them with Moses.**

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Jesus is accompanied by Elijah, 'the first and the greatest of the prophets', who had ascended into heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). Moses 'the supreme law-giver' of Israel whose death is recorded in Deuteronomy 34:5-6, was also there.

Jewish tradition holds that he too was taken up to heaven. Both had encountered God on Mount Sinai. Together they represent the whole of the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets.

### **Let us make three tents.**

Although he is afraid, Peter wants to capture this moment of 'theophany', (a Greek word meaning divine appearance), typically the cause of awe and fear. His desire to pitch tents may have been prompted by the autumn feast of Tabernacles (Succoth in Hebrew). A time when the Jews camped out to celebrate the harvest and commemorate their forty years in the desert. (Lev 23:39-43).

### **A cloud came covering them in shadow.**

In Jewish thought the presence of God is regularly connected with a cloud.

The transfiguration, like Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11), is a Trinitarian event. The Holy Spirit's presence is symbolised by a cloud rather than a dove.

God addresses the disciples, revealing Jesus' identity as His son. as He also did at Jesus' baptism. These are the only words God the Father is recorded as saying in the Gospels.

### **Listen to him.**

This command from God recalls Moses' promise to the people that one day God would raise up a 'prophet...to him you shall listen'. (Deut 18:15).

Jesus knew that it was only when the disciples had witnessed his crucifixion and resurrection that they would understand what he had been telling them.

Only then would they realise what meant for Jesus to be 'the Messiah', and be able to tell others what they had witnessed on the mountain top.

