

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

✠ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

St Mark's account of the temptation narrative is extremely brief. Mark lacks the threefold temptation and the statement that Jesus fasted.

Both St Matthew (whose version we are more familiar with from the traditional *pericopes) and St Luke expand the story from their common source.

In parenthesis - for our purposes a ***pericope** - περικοπή, is "a cutting-out" of a set of verses of sacred scripture that forms one coherent unit or thought, suitable for public reading. The Gospels set for the Liturgical year are often of course just that - so that we, the Faithful might enter into our Liturgical journey in a less cluttered and more useful manner.

It is even possible that St Mark intends to suggest that the angels "fed" Jesus as the Greek word used for "ministered" is in the imperfect tense suggesting an action over a *prolonged* period rather than a one-off act....

It could be that Mark is suggesting the Moses / Elijah typology of the manna in the wilderness which of course was also called "the food of angels" as in Psalm 78 verse 5 and of course Elijah is also sustained by the ravens during his 40 days fast.

Mark's mention of the wild beasts also suggests a further typology - in Psalm 91: 11-13, we are told that the righteous man of God will be protected by the angels and will be immune from the attacks of wild beasts.

Even more striking is a passage from the *Testament of Naphtali* (from the intertestamental collection known as *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*) Here in this Testament, the patriarch Naphtali says to his sons -

The devil shall flee from you
And the wild beasts shall flee from you....
And the angels shall cleave to you.

Clearly here, are the same three features as in the temptation story - the devil, wild beasts and angels. Perhaps there is even the thought here that Christ is the second Adam, who restores the harmony of nature previously destroyed by Adam's fall.

In this narrative, Satan put in his usual claim to a son of Adam - **but this time, he met his match!**

It may be that (unlike Matthew and Luke) the Evangelist Mark was not so much interested in the psychological experience of Jesus but rather sought to proclaim him as the New Israel, the new Moses, the new Elijah - the righteous man of God and the new Adam through whom the powers of evil are defeated and the peace of paradise restored.

Just as St Mark had an agenda - to proclaim Jesus as the new Adam and the New Israel, the purpose of the Lenten Readings at the Church's Liturgy is to walk with Jesus through his ministry, passion and death that they might participate in the Mystery of the Resurrection and the Paschal Feast.

So the Old Testament lessons focus on Israel's salvation history and the prefiguration of the redemptive act of God in Christ, whilst the Epistles are either expositions of the meaning of the Cross or the believer's participation in salvation through baptism.

Meanwhile the Gospels begin with the Marcan temptation and transfiguration stories on the first two Sundays and then follow a series of readings from the Fourth Gospel which contain predictions of Christ's death on the cross and interpretations of its meaning.

So here we are at the beginning of our Lenten journey - seeking Jesus the new Adam and the New Israel. Our search is not only as individual sons and daughters of God but also as the people of God who gather at the Liturgy to hear the Word of the Lord and feed on Christ - the foretaste of the heavenly Banquet.

However since the first centuries of the church, Lent has been a special time of prayer, penance, sacrifice and good works in preparation of the celebration of Easter.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (of Vatican Council II) stated, "The two elements which are especially characteristic of Lent -- the recalling of baptism or the preparation for it, and penance -- should be given greater emphasis in the liturgy and in liturgical catechesis.

It is by means of them that the Church prepares the faithful for the celebration of Easter, while they hear God's word more frequently and devote more time to prayer"

So we are challenged to draw apart to perform spiritual works, like attending the Liturgy more often - including

week days, or attending the Stations of the Cross, or making a regular holy hour in church (before the Blessed Sacrament), and to take extra time for personal prayer and spiritual reading and to seek spiritual direction.

In the Exhortation of the Book of Common Prayer the Priest is required to say to his congregation -

“... no man should come to the Holy Communion, but with a full trust in God’s mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God’s Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God’s holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.”

Although all these practices may have evolved over the centuries, the focus remains the same: to repent of sin, to renew our faith and to prepare to celebrate joyfully the mysteries of our salvation.

For centuries, this has been and *is* the church’s sacred time -
the time of opportunity for a new beginning -
YOUR time of opportunity for a new beginning with God in Christ Jesus.

The Church still offers you all these gifts - extra services to be with God and his people, opportunities for the study of the Sacred Scriptures, special services and devotions, opportunities for giving to Mission, and opportunities for

spiritual direction and confession.

Will you let another Lent pass you by? As St Paul says in
2 Corinthians 6:2

For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Now is the day of salvation - now is the day of salvation - take hold of this Lent and its opportunities to grow in God's grace and love.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN