

HEARERS OF THE WORD



Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 91 (90); Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness

Luke 4:1 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.’”

Luke 4:5 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.’”

Luke 4:9 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.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The temptation in the wilderness is found in the three Synoptic Gospels: (Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13). Mark’s version is very brief, whereas Matthew and Luke share a longer account. The order of Matthew’s second and third temptations (bread, Temple, kingdoms) is inverted in Luke (bread, kingdoms, Temple). Luke’s editing shows his literary gifts and his theological concerns. For example, he frames the temptations with “Son of God”, so that the identity of Jesus is the issue. Also, he focuses on Jerusalem, with a more natural movement from the wilderness to the Temple.

KIND OF WRITING

In terms of ancient biography, we are still within the introduction to the story, that is, Luke 1-4. As part of the introductory material, the writer shows the “hero” undergoing “tests”, which are emblematic of and anticipate temptations during the ministry.

Cf. from the Fourth Gospel: Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” (John 4:31–32) When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:15) After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were

Thought for the day

The days of spring lengthen and Lent echoes nature inviting us as well to a new springtime of faith. As in farming and gardening, there is work to be done if new growth is to flourish or even to happen at all. We have to look back and see what has done well and what has, in effect, died off. We need to make space by clearing the ground and looking at ourselves honestly. It would be good to identify what will feed and sustain us during this journey from the ashes of Ash Wednesday to the new birth of the Easter.

Prayer

In this springtime, creator God, we watch new life appear from the dark earth after the night of winter. Help us also to grow. In us, there is darkness and night; yet we know that you can bring us once more to life. Amen.

looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” (John 7:1–5)

Luke uses the story to continue his presentation of the identity of Jesus, this time as Son of God, as a Moses-type figure, surpassing the original.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The three scriptural passages cited refer to trials of Israel during the Exodus.

He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deut 8:3)

The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear. (Deut 6:13)

Do not put the Lord your God to the

	Readings	Topic	Message
LENT 1	Deut 26:4-10	<i>A wandering Aramean</i>	Story of faith
Creed	Psalm 91 (90)	<i>Be with me, Lord</i>	Prayer of trust
	Rom 10:8-13	<i>The word is near</i>	Confession of faith
	Luke 4:1-13	<i>Temptations</i>	Test of faith

test, as you tested him at Massah. (Deut 6:16)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested. (Heb 2:18) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4:15)

“Son of God” links the temptation to the birth story: The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. (Luke 1:35). The title also makes a link with the crucial question at the trial before the Sanhedrin: All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He said to them, “You say that I am.” (Luke 22:70)

ST PAUL

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:7–10)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 As usual in Luke, it is the Spirit who moves the events of salvation.

Verse 2 Forty is symbolic, indicating a complete cycle: the Flood (Gen 7:12); Moses on the mountain (Ex 24:18); the wilderness generation (Ex 16:35; Num 14:20-23); Nineveh is given forty days’ notice (Jonah 3:4); the risen Lord appears to the disciples for forty days after the resurrection (After his suffering he pre-

sented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God [Acts 1:3]).

Verse 3 Compare: *The leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!* (Luke 23:35–36).

Verse 4 Citation from Deuteronomy 8:3.

Verse 5 This happens at a spiritual level. Jesus has his own authority in this Gospel (Luke 4:6, 32, 36; 5:24; 7:8; 9:1; 10:19; 20:2, 8). Likewise, there was already “glory” at his birth: Luke 2:14. Cf. 9:26, 31-32; 21:27; 24:26.

Verse 6 The devil, as the father of lies, is lying, of course.

Verse 7 The ultimate reversal of what is right. Cf. *But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.” If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? —for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.* (Luke 11:15, 18–19)

Verse 8 Citation from Deuteronomy 6:13.

Verse 9 Cf. *One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!* (Luke 23:39–40)

Verse 10 *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.* (Ps 91:11)

Verse 11 *On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.* (Ps 91:12)

Verse 12 Citation from Deuteronomy 6:16.

Verse 13 The opportune time (*kairos*) comes at the start of the passion narrative: *Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid*

of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve. (Luke 22:1–4)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Jesus was led by the Spirit into what proved to be a wilderness experience. When you look back on times when you hit a low point, can you see the presence of the Spirit of God in some of them?

2. Jesus is on the verge of starting his public ministry. In the temptations we can see his struggle to say ‘yes’ to the mission given him by God. Perhaps some of your important decisions have been preceded by a time of anxiety and worry. What helped you to say ‘yes’ to risky but hope-filled invitations in your life?

3. Behind each of the devil’s invitations was a basic temptation to lose trust in God. How have you been tempted in this way? What helped you to hold on to trust in God?

4. One can enter into the temptations singly and ask:

- How have I been tempted to give priority to bodily needs and satisfactions?
- How have I been tempted to a self-ish use of power?
- How have I been tempted to seek to be the centre of attention?

PRAYER

Lord our God, you alone do we worship only your word gives life. Sustain your Church on its Lenten journey. When we walk through the desert of temptation, strengthen us to renounce the power of evil. When our faith is tested by doubt, illumine our hearts with Easter’s bright promise.

We ask this through Christ, our deliverance and hope, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty God for ever and ever.

Lent 1	Deuteronomy 26:4-10	Creed	Ps 91 (90)	Roman 10:8-13	Luke 4:1-13
Lent 2	Genesis 15:5-12,17-18	Covenant	Ps 27 (26)	Philippians 3:17-4:1	Luke 9:28-36
Lent 3	Exodus 3:1-8,13-15	Burning bush	Ps 103 (102)	1 Cor 10:1-6,10-12	Luke 13:1-9
Lent 4	Joshua 5:9-12	First Passover	Ps 34 (33)	2 Cor 5:17-21	Lk 15:1-3,11-32
Lent 5	Isaiah 43:16-21	A new deed	Ps 126 (125)	Philippians 3:8-14	John 8:1-11

The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart

Rom 10:5 *Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them."* 6 *But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)* 7 *"or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).* 8 *But what does it say?*

"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In Lent, the first reading and the Gospel are each on a distinct track, following a traditional sequence of stories. The OT readings offer an over-arching narrative: an early creed, Abraham, Moses etc. The middle reading can function as a bridge text. In the first reading, we hear a creed to be recited. In the Gospel, Jesus uses the word of God in a dispute to confound the devil. In the reading from Romans, we are reminded that the "creed" is in our hearts and that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved, as long as we believe with the heart. There is really a link!

KIND OF WRITING

In Romans 9-11, Paul is discussing the why most of his fellow Jews did not recognise Jesus as the Christ. These

three chapters are extraordinarily personal for Paul himself. The issue arises across the New Testament, but these chapters are the most sustained and detailed reflection to have come down to us. Our short reading today takes us to the very heart the theology of St Paul.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Once more, the context in the community is a profound division in Rome between Christians of Jewish origin and Christians of Gentile origin. Ultimately, in Paul's mind, we are put in right relationship ("justified") by faith, first of all by the faith(fulness) of Jesus and then by our own act of trust. The centrality of faith "open to all" relativises certain parts of the traditional Law, especially the so-called identity markers of circumcision, dietary laws and Sabbath observance.

RELATED PASSAGES

This commandment I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it too remote. It is not in heaven, as though one must say, "Who will go up to heaven to get it for us and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" And it is not across the sea, as though one must say, "Who will cross over to the other side of the sea and get it for us and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" For the thing is very near you—it is in your mouth and in your mind so that you can do it. (Deut 30:11–14)

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation. For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not in line with the truth. For ignoring the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking instead to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, with the result that there is righteousness for

everyone who believes. (Rom 10:1–4)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Paul does not think the Torah has been somehow abolished or superseded. The word "end" in Rom 10:4 means end is the sense of arrival or fulfilment.

Verse 8 The whole context of Deut 30:11-14 is essential: the return from Exile, with a renewed interiorisation of the Torah (cf. Jer 31:33–34).

Verse 9 Both lips and heart stand here for the whole person, with the lips saying what is in the heart. Cf. 1 Cor 12:3. Cf. *Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts.* (1 John 5:10)

Verse 10 Faith is both internal and external, with no contradiction. Notice the parallel between justification and salvation. Cf. 1 Cor 1:30 NB.

Verse 11 The citation is from the Septuagint (Greek OT) of Isaiah: *Therefore thus says the Lord, See, I will lay for the foundations of Zion a precious, choice stone, a highly valued cornerstone for its foundations, and the one who believes in him will not be put to shame.* (LXX Isa 28:16)

Verse 12 This is Paul's constant teaching and his great insight into the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Verse 13 Citing Joel 2:32. Notice the move from "no one" to "everyone."

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. These thrilling words of Paul take us to the heart of our own faith, in all its vulnerable simplicity.
2. In faith, we do move from external encouragement / instruction to internal experience and conviction.

PRAYER

God of all mercy, put a new spirit within and write your new law in our hearts. Help us to live the Gospel from the heart so that all we say and do may bear witness to your gracious gift of faith. Amen.

Romans 1-15	Romans 9-11	Romans 9:30-10:21
1:18-4:35 <i>All in need of grace and faith</i> 5-8 <i>All in receipt of salvation and grace</i>	Introduction: 9:1-5 <i>Enigma of refusal</i> A. Proof: 9:6-29 <i>God is consistent</i>	9:30-33: <i>A reversal did occur</i> 10:1-4 <i>Christ as the "end" of the Law</i>
9-11 Jews + Gentiles in God's plan	B. Proof: 9:30-10:21 Torah + Christ	10:5-13 Righteousness and faith
12:1-15:6 <i>Practical advice on tolerance</i> 15:7- 33 <i>Letter conclusion</i>	A* Proof: 11:1-32 <i>God has a purpose</i> Conclusion: 11:33-36 <i>Mystery of God's will</i>	10:14-18 <i>Sending messengers to proclaim</i> 10:19-21 <i>They did not hear</i>

A wandering Aramean was my ancestor: he went down into Egypt

Deut. 26:1 *When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, 2 you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. 3 You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us."*

4 When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, 5 you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6 When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, 7 we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8 The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9 and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The unusual lectionary choice today reflects a pattern across the first readings of Lent, as follows:

1. A wandering Aramean
2. Abraham
3. Moses
4. Joshua
5. Return from Exile

This means that while the first readings do indeed link with the other texts for each Sunday, there is also didactic pattern across the Sundays. There is a similar strategy each Lent, reflecting the great care taken in selecting the readings. This year, a large narrative arc of salvation history is offered, giving major moments and reactions. Our reading is a

kind of credal statement (more below). The great Gerhard von Rad promoted ancient credal nuclei as core passages, giving access to the foundational stories of Israel, before the evolution of the biblical text as we know it. More recent scholarship would be much less confident about this. This is partly because these "creeds" are not especially ancient and partly because the presence of Arameans at the time indicated is not backed by archaeology.

The first three verses have been added for the sake of clarity

KIND OF WRITING

This is one of three short "credal" narratives. For the other two passages, see immediately below.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The book of Deuteronomy:

Preamble: 1:1–4:43

Law-giving in Moab: 4:44–28:68

Covenant in Moab: 29:1–32:47

Benedictions: 33:1–29

Deuteronomy 26:1-15 deals with the offerings of the first fruits etc. with special emphasis on the confessions of faith to accompany these occasions. This is the basket mentioned at the start. So, the passage is really about Israel's gratitude for God's gifts to his holy people. The preceding verses 1-3 show that all this is part of a blueprint for living in the Promised Land. Vv. 5-10 tell in a simplified way the story of salvation. The remaining verses specify further devotions.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us

alive, as is now the case. (Deut 6:20–24)

Joshua 24:1-13, the other creed, is too long to cite in these brief notes.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 4 As is clear from vv. 1-3, the basket contains the first fruits, the symbolic offering of the whole harvest to God.

Verse 5 Wandering, in Hebrew, literally denotes one who is destitute, perishing. In any case, an unsettled life is indicated.

Verse 6 Cf. Exodus 1-2.

Verse 7 *Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters." (Ex 3:7)*

Verse 8 *Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses. (Ex 14:30–31)*

Verse 9 Cf. Joshua 1-3. It has often been observed that the Sinai traditions are not represented in this credo.

Verse 10 This takes us back to the original purpose of the recitation (cf. vv. 1-3). The offering of the first fruits is given great importance in the Pentateuch: Ex 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; Lev 2:14; 23:10, 17, 20, 40; Num 18:13; 28:26; Deut 18:4 (cf. ch. 26). St Paul is able to use the expression metaphorically in 1 Cor 15:20, 23 (cf. Rom 8:23; 11:16).

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough." *Meister Eckhardt*.

2. The prayer tells the story of salvation in summary form, yet close to experience. If you were to give such a summary, linked to experience, what would your offering prayer be? After all, gratitude is "the memory of the heart."

3. From the ground we came and the ground gives us life. We are not over against nature but part of it. A prayer of being part of all that God has made.

PRAYER

Loving God, our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness but makes us grow in your grace. Each day you show us a father's love and for all your gifts we are grateful. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 91 (90); Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

READINGS 1, 2 AND 3

By means of the responsorial psalm, there is a link with the Gospel, although somewhat tenuous: *what do we owe to God?*

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The psalm is more a preparation for the Gospel than exactly a response to the reading. However, it does mention trusting in God and calling on his name, both of which are part of the first reading.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First Reading

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Silent gratitude is no good to anyone, and so we should express our gratitude to others and, of course, to God. All that we are and have comes from him.

Second Reading

Romans 10:8-13

We probably don't look too closely at the nature of our own act of faith / trust in God. Paul invites us into that space today.

Gospel

Luke 4:1-13

In this symbolic story, Luke reminds us that Jesus too had to struggle with temptation. The stories given reflect real issues which turned up during the ministry of Jesus—there were indeed false ways to be the Messiah!

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 10 March

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

Sometimes, we tend to think that Israelite faith was somehow more external than Christian faith. This readings both put us right on that and lands us with a direct challenge for ourselves today.

Matthew 25:31-46

There are different ways to read this so-called parable. Firstly, it is not a parable but a kind of teaching on how we will be judged. The purpose is not so much a description of the last judgment as

warning to change how we live our lives. Part of the meaning is that the church (*as the least of my brothers and sisters*) discloses Christ himself through our vulnerability.

Tuesday 11 March

Isaiah 55:10-11

This short reading (only one sentence) proclaim the effectiveness of God's word. It is as effective, almost as automatic, as rain falling on the ground. But we are the ground, so it does depend too on letter the word into my heart.

Matthew 6:7-15

The opening words are a clear warning that prayer is not informing or cajoling the divinity. If not that, then what? According to St Augustine, it is the opening of the heart so that *we may be capable of receiving* God's gifts.

Wednesday 12 March

Jonah 3:1-10

The book of Jonah—a comic shot across the bows of Ezra and Nehemiah—is taken at face value today. It is difficult to imagine the cows as converting! Nevertheless, the seriousness of response invite reflection on the seriousness of our project of conversion through Lent.

Luke 11:29-32

Jesus refers to the people of Nineveh and in a way redoubles the challenge to us today. We *know* Jesus is greater than Jonah et al, and yet what does this knowledge profit is if we remain unmoved?

Thursday 13 March

Esther 4:17

The topic in today's readings is really prayer of intercession. In our first reading, we see a women in earnest prayer, not just for herself but for her people. Esther reminds God to be true to himself!

Matthew 7:7-12

This kind of passage—so plain and direct—can be problematic for us today on several levels. Firstly, we all have experience of interceding and apparently *not being heard*. We do not always get what

we want. Secondly, we don't really think God must be informed or, worse, persuaded. Again, Augustine helps: we pray not to change God but to change ourselves, so that we choose what God wants for us.

Friday 14 March

Ezekiel 18:21-28

Conversion, turning to God with our whole selves, is the teaching here. Ezekiel puts before us two ways, life and death. It is not quite so simple—we do believe that one sin cannot really ruining all the good we have done in the past. Nevertheless, the point is not lost: God calls us to conversion, to renounce our sins, *so that we may live and be truly alive*.

Matthew 5:20-26

In keeping with the first reading, the gospel is direct: If your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees... It is easy to confuse religion with practice and morality with actions. Jesus, however, takes us to the heart of ethical living—it is all from within. In this, Jesus is very much in line with prophets of the Hebrew Bible.

Saturday 15 March

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

True faithfulness is a matter of the heart, as we hear from the book of Deuteronomy. The Law is to be kept first of all with our hearts and our souls. It may help to recall that the word Torah means instruction or path of life. It is, therefore, much more than a set of regulations or commandments. The psalm is a big help here: Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long. (Ps 119:97) Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble. (Ps 119:165)

Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus continues his teaching on the roots of ethical behaviour in attitudes of the heart. The comparison are sharp, especially in a culture where being Christian is reduced to be being decent or well-behaved. As Jesus points out even non-believers manage that, so it is no great credit. Something deeper is being asked us, something more costly.