



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness

St Luke 4. 1-13

Sunday 9 March

We are very familiar with the story of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. We are told that immediately after his baptism, where God publicly acclaimed anew as his 'beloved Son', Jesus was led into the wilderness, where he fasted and prayed, for forty days, the length of the period of Lent in which we are now in. Whilst there, the devil appeared to him and tempted him; to show he was God's son merely by performing a miracle, to abandon God in his time of need, and to test God by asking for outward signs of God's favour.

These are all the sorts of temptations that we face in our daily lives, though perhaps in not such a dramatic way or context. What this well-known passage re-asserts is that being a follower of Jesus is no guarantee that pain will be removed from our lives. Jesus was tempted to take 'shortcuts' to spare his future suffering, but these he rejected.

- Who do you think the devil is?
- Is there such a thing as evil?
- If it exists, how is evil made real in you, others, in events?
- What do you understand when you pray 'deliver us from evil' in the Lord's Prayer?
- Is the choice between good and evil a moral or a spiritual question?

It is all too easy to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Yes, the 'medieval' images of the devil such as we see in the 'doom' paintings above the chancels of ancient churches may be seen as a quaint relic of a distant past. Yes, the image of the devil as portrayed in popular imagination and even in the image pictured here, does not accord with our 21st century knowledge. But there is a danger that if we have too weak an image, or too shallow an understanding, then we dismiss the reality altogether, and that would be not to our personal detriment, but more importantly, it would compromise God's kingdom being realised in the world today. As Lent begins, we have a specific chance to review our own discipleship, to acknowledge the ways in which we have succumbed to temptation, and to re-focus our attention on God.

- In what ways are you tempted today?
- Is evil at war with God as an equal force, and humanity caught in the crossfire?
- Do you take appropriate responsibility for the times you have failed?
- How important is forgiveness – remembering again the words in the Lord's Prayer?
- What can you do to resist temptation?

As we ponder these questions we do so with the certain knowledge that Christ's victory on the cross is absolute; as we sing in the Easter hymn, 'The strife is o'er, the battle one'. Evil has been overcome, but still shows its face in the temptations that Christ faced before the victory, and which we face today, but in the certainty of that victory.