



Feb. 21, 2021 Mk. 1: 12-15, Gen 9:8-15

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### ENTERING THE SCENE:

Once again we embark on the season of Lent. The first reading for today is the story of Noah and the Ark. It is as if God is doing a re-boot on creation. Things are bad and the only way to remedy it is to start over. That didn't produce the desired results so once more God is trying again, but this time God is going to get personally involved by way of the Incarnation. We see Jesus resisting the re-boot method offered by the Satan and choosing another way. The way of love that suffers with the creation process so as to reveal the true nature of reality.

Jesus offers those attracted to his good news the chance to turn around (repent) and look at everything in new way. Lent invites us to do the same.

### Mk. 1:9-15

9 During that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was **baptized** in the Jordan by John. 10 **Immediately on coming up** out of the water he saw the sky **rent** in two and the **spirit descending** on him like a **dove**. 11 Then a **voice** came from the heavens: "You are my **beloved son**. On you my **favor rests**. 12 The **Spirit immediately drove him out** into the **wilderness**. 13 And he was in the wilderness **forty days, tempted by Satan**; and he was with the **wild beasts**; and the **angels ministered** to him. 14 Now after **John was arrested**, Jesus came into **Galilee**, preaching the **gospel of God**, 15 and saying, "The **time is fulfilled**, and the **kingdom of God** is at hand; **repent**, and **believe** in the **gospel**."

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** John the Baptist prepares the way of the Lord. How is my Lent going to do the same?

**PRAYER:** Brother Jesus, you came among us to be our brother and friend and to introduce us to a deeper appreciation of God's love. You could only give us what you had, and that is the experience of being unconditionally loved. Once we got a taste of that we couldn't stay the same ever again. Help us as we enter into our own time in the desert of Lent to resist the easy fixes that the world offers and go deeper into what being loved really means for us and others. Amen.

## WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

**BAPTIZED:** (see information below) We have talked of baptism several times in the previous weeks readings, but this one is repeated for the first Sunday of Lent, the time when we enter into the death and resurrection in a more intimate way. *How does the event of Lent enlarge the understanding of your dying and rising into Christ?*

**COMING UP:** When Jesus comes up out of the waters (reminiscent of the crossing of the Reed Sea) the meaning of baptism in the Christian sense begins.

*Are you ready to accept the baptism Jesus accepted? (Lk. 12:50) How can this lent enable you to say yes to Jesus' question in Luke?*

**RENT:** The heavens are rent now at the revelation of God's will. Later, (Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 23:45) the temple veil will be rent, this time preparing the way for the resurrection and revelation of God in a totally new way.

*What has to be rent in your life this lent in order to let God into your life in a totally new way?*

**DESCENDING:** In the mind of people of Jesus' times, God was - up there - out there - and needed to 'come down' to where humanity lived.

*Do you still have this concept of God? If so, how is it working for you?*

**DOVE:** A dove carried the symbolism of the Spirit of God, and it was thought that anyone peaceful enough to have a dove light on them was a person of God.

*What helps you identify a person of God today? What metaphor would you use to describe this awareness?*

**VOICE:** To be a voice is to give oneself to another in the gospel of Mark. The voice that he heard at his Baptism, speaks again, and assures Jesus that he is indeed doing God's will.

*How do you hear God's voice? What takes the place of the dove for you?*

**BELOVED SON:** Just before his time in the wilderness Jesus heard these words from the heavens. Jesus could be who he was, because he knew that he was loved, he was son.

*What would it take for you to acknowledge being a son or daughter of God, who is very much loved?*

**FAVOR RESTS:** To be favored is to have a kindness given to you by someone.

*Can you let God's favor rest on you, and accept God's unconditional love?*

**SPIRIT:** In the days of Jesus, God's spirit was seen as the energy that enabled people to follow God's plan for them. Therefore, it was imperative that one defined just what spirit was the source of a person's power.

*Reflect on the power of the Spirit in your life. How do you experience this power in your everyday world?*

**IMMEDIATELY:** This is one of Mark's favorite themes. He has a sense of urgency about the whole life and mission of Jesus. He marches us relentlessly toward the cross. There is a sense of desperation about the entire enterprise.

*How do you respond when you hear the word immediately? Does it appear to shift you into another gear, ready for a quick response? Does Mark's gospel have the sense that such a response is called for?*

**DROVE:** Mark has the Spirit driving Jesus into the desert, suggesting that Jesus wanted to linger near the scene of his baptism, relishing the feeling of love and security that surrounded him there.

*Remember the times when you have felt driven to do something. What did it feel like? How did you explain that urgency to others? To yourself? Are you able to discern what spirit (love or fear) is doing the driving?*

**OUT:** Jesus was with all those people who were drawn to John's message. He then received his affirmation from God. One would think that the natural thing to do was to take up his own calling to preach, teach and heal right away while the Spirit was fresh upon him. But no, Jesus goes out alone to contemplate what this all was to mean.

*What might happen to and with and for you if you adopted Jesus' method, or do you want to plow ahead, without reflection? How do you give God a chance to be in the driver's seat?*

**WILDERNESS:** The wilderness is that place that is foreign to us. It is full of wildness and things that are beyond our control. We need to stay alert just to survive there. Jesus now is tested to see where his strengths lie.

*What are your strengths? Do they ever get you into trouble? We are very aware of our weaknesses and therefore more cautious when we know we are in their domain. But our strengths seem to have a life of their own, and lead us into temptation more often. Reflect on how going OUT can help before you act on something.*

**FORTY:** The people of God know well the significance of the number 40. It rained 40 days and nights. They wandered 40 years in the desert. Moses was with God on the mountain before being given the commandments 40 days. Often 40 years in

Jesus' day equaled a lifetime. The number 40 represents enough time for a significant change or thing to occur, and yet not too much time to lose momentum.

*Think about the nature of timing in the process of making decisions. How much is enough? Too much? How do you know the difference?*

**TEMPTED:** Until you examine just what energy is driving you, it will always seem to come from the outside in. Once you find the compulsion and deal with it, the energy, like Jesus', can come from the inside out.

*What is drawing you toward the temptation? Why is it tempting? Are you truly being drawn or are you being compelled toward it*

**SATAN:** Satan historically has been the one who keeps God honest, as in the book of Job. Down through scriptural history the role and understanding of Satan undergoes significant development. At first it was more of an energy source: the source of entropy. Eventually that power becomes personalized and is given a name that begins with a capital S rather than a small s.

*How do you identify a source of energy in you that is moving you to do something? If it is coming from fear, use the same response Jesus used: "Get behind me you Satan". Can you remember any time when you felt like that? Do you think it would help to interrupt the energy flow by using this formula?*

**WILD BEASTS:** Wild beasts are free and uncontrolled beings. They are not in the service of anything but themselves and their own survival. Energy can be like that, and can be the source of addictions and problems. Wildness can be; busyness, noise, or dangers of any sort.

*How do you live with wildness and stay unharmed by it? What is untamed in you? Are you living creatively with that source of energy?*

**ANGELS:** Angels are messengers of God in the bible. Angels are represented as ministering to Jesus, and they receive their mission from God. It is said that angels are seeing through God's eye, or from another angle.

*How has this discussion of scripture helped you to see something from another angle? What messages have you received from God through other people or nature that has ministered to you? Have you ever called anyone an angel?*

**MINISTERED:** Being ministered to means being cared for. Jesus endured the dangers of the wilderness confident that the God of his baptism would care for him.

*Can you go out with this same confidence? What/who ministers to you? Does nature? Do people you don't even know care for you? How? How do you minister to others/nature?*

**JOHN:** John was Jesus' cousin and was 3 months older than Jesus. John also shares the experience of the wilderness and his total dependence on God for his needs. All John knows for *sure* is that he ISN'T the Messiah.

*What is your role in preparing the way for the Lord? How do you help make the world a place where God's will is done here as it is in heaven?*

**ARRESTED:** John is now out of the picture. He is "out of the way" and we can now focus our attention on Jesus.

*What energy source in you needs to be freed, in order for you to minister to others?*

**GALILEE:** Galilee is that place where Jesus begins his ministry. It is a little, unpretentious place that he calls home. It is also the district of the Gentiles or non-Jews who don't believe in the God of Abraham. Jesus starts out where people don't already have God stereotyped.

*What images of God do you have that prevent you from seeing the new thing God is doing in your life?*

**TIME:** Time in scripture is not seen as we do today. It is the place where God is doing the new thing in creation history.

*What things in your clock/calendar time keep you from being in God's time? Do you have a practice of shifting into God's time each day/week? Look at your checkbook register and your calendar. Do they reveal anything about your commitment to God's time?*

**FULFILLED:** The above discussion of forty discusses this concept. God, always involves humanity in the creation process and never rushes the job. The power of grace flows most fully when human will acts in harmony with divine will.

*How do you know when that harmony exists? How do you deal with the apparent slowness God's process? Do you trust that God knows what God is doing, or do you try to micro-manage the process yourself?*

**KINGDOM OF GOD:** The reason for the Incarnation was for all of creation to realize its fullness in the kingdom of God. We needed a hands on experience of God-ness in order to be able to begin to see that God loves all that God creates.

*What do you think of when you hear the words: the kingdom of God? Many of the stories in the gospels begin with the saying: the kingdom of heaven is like a..... What ideas do you have that keep that kingdom from coming?*

**REPENT:** To repent is to turn around and look at something in a new way. John preached repent and then you can be saved. Jesus preached, you are saved, and people went home and repented.

*In what ways do you still cling to the old message of John and see Jesus' message as too good to be true? How would you relate to others if you really knew that God loves everyone as much as God loves you?*

**BELIEVE:** To believe is to accept something as true. The word Gospel means "good news".

*Do you really accept as true the understanding of God that Jesus gave us, or do you cling to an idea that more closely resembles the pre-Jesus understanding? What prevents you from claiming this truth?*

**GOSPEL:** Literally "good news".

*What in this text today is good news for you? News implies something that is new. What have you found new in this reading?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Mk. 1:9ff // Mt. 3:13-17; Lk. 3:21f; Jn. 1:32f; Mk. 1:11 // Ps. 2:7; Mk. 1:12 // Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13; Mk. 1:14 // Mt. 4:12-17; Mk. 1:15 // Mt. 3:2;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Gn. 9:8-15; Ps. 25: 4-9; 1 Pt. 3:18-22; Mk. 1:12-15;  
Revised Common Lectionary: Gn. 9: 8-17; Ps. 25: 1-10; 1 Pt. 3:18-22; Mk. 1:9-15;

### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

LENT: The early church in the year 325 at the Council of Nicaea set the period of days of Lent at 40 days. It was to be a time of taking stock and fasting.

Remember finally, that the ashes on your forehead are created from the burnt palms of last Palm Sunday. New beginnings invariably come from old false things that are allowed to die. Richard Rohr

**Lent** is the time for trimming the soul and scraping the sludge off a life turned slipshod. Lent is about taking stock of time, even religious time. Lent is about exercising the control that enables us to say no to ourselves so that when life turns hard of its own accord we have the stamina to say yes to its twists and turns with faith and with hope...Lent is the time to make new efforts to be what we say we want to be. Chittister, Joan, O.S.B. *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*. On chapter 49.

*Satan*, the "adversary" or "accuser," was not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible until after the exile, when, under Persian influence, this figure becomes prominent (Job 1:6; Zech 3: 1-2; *Gen. Rab. 57.4*). Pg. 59.  
Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press. 2011

In a profound sense the reign of God unfolds as the holy web of relationships that binds us all to each other and to all of creation. When Jesus declares that the reign of God is at hand (Mk. 1:15), he is really saying that the reign of God within the entire universe is now manifesting itself in a new way, in an inner conversion of heart and a transformation of society which is good news to the poor. Whenever and wherever God is present and ruling within us, as humans, there will be both an inner change of heart and a change in the political, social, and religious order of things. The presence of the unconditional love of God is so deeply embedded within the universe and within the Earth that to live in tune with the Earth is to live in tune with the reign of God.

Wessels, Cletus. *Jesus in the New Universe Story*. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books. 2003. Pg. 212.

On the day of his Baptism Jesus received an extremely important revelation about himself and about God; God reveals himself to him as a father reveals himself to his son, namely, fully, as *Abba*. Pg. 352.

Olivera, Bernardo, O.C.S.O. *The Search for God: Conference, letters, and homilies*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Pub. 2002

In the century before the birth of Jesus there is a saying from a document called the [Testimony of the Twelve Patriarchs](#) that reads: "If you do what is good, my children, both men and angels shall bless you; and God shall be glorified among the Gentiles through you, and the devils shall flee you; and the wild beasts shall fear you; and God shall love you, and the angels shall clove to you." (Naphtalis section)

[The Gospel of the Ebionites](#) ( In Epiphanius, *Against Heresies*, XXX. 13. 7-8) [7-8] After the people were baptized, Jesus also came and was baptized by John. And as he came up from the water, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove and entering into him. And a voice from heaven said, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." And again, "Today I have begotten thee." And immediately a great light shone around the place; and John, seeing it, said to him, "Who are you, Lord?" and again a voice from heaven said to him. "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." Then John, falling down before him, said, "I beseech you, Lord, baptize me!" But he forbade him, saying, "Let it be so; for thus it is fitting to fulfill all things."

(Justin, *Dialogue* 88:3) When Jesus went down to the water, fire was kindled in the Jordan; and when he was rising from the water, the Holy Spirit came upon him like a dove, as the apostles of our Christ have written.

**Gospel According to the Hebrews:** ( in Jerome, *Against Pelagius III.2*) The mother of the Lord and his brothers said to him. "John baptizes for the forgiveness of sins; let us go and be baptized by him." But he said to them, "In what have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him? Unless, perhaps, what I have just said is a sin of ignorance." (in Jerome, *Commentary of Isaiah 11:2*) When the Lord ascended from the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him, and said to him, "My son, in all the prophets I was waiting for you, that you might come, and that I might rest in you. For you are my rest; and you are my firstborn son, who reigns forever."

Mention of John the Baptist: **Antiquities of the Jews** by Josephus: Book 18. Chapter 5. Section 2. of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; his food was wild honey, tasting like manna, like a cake in olive oil.

**BAPTISM:** The Qumran Scrolls now indicate that baptism was practiced by the sect of Qumran before John the Baptist; and a connection between John and this group is not excluded. In the **Manual of Discipline** it is stated that mere ablution cannot really cleanse a man; only by submission of his soul to all of God's ordinances can he become clean and thus be sprinkled with the waters of purification. God Himself will finally purge all the acts of man and refine man's substance, destroying every spirit of perversity within his flesh and cleansing him by a holy spirit and sprinkling upon him the spirit of truth like waters of purification to cleanse him -- a phrase remarkable similar to Mk. 1:8. The Manual, however, forbids any one to go into the water in order to attain the purity of holy men, which indicates that the sect did not regard the rite in itself as effective. It had no value except as a token of the sincere inner disposition of repentance. Article on Baptism--McKenzie, John. **Dictionary of the Bible**. Macmillan Pub. NY. 1965. Page 79.

The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason. (Murder in the Cathedral, Part I. T.S. Eliot)

To understand Jesus' attitude and his teachings, it can be helpful to imagine that through his entire lifetime, God, his Father, kept whispering into his ears that blessing from his baptism: "You are my beloved, my blessed one, my son, and in you I am well-pleased." Those words, in fact, form the consciousness of Jesus, especially in Luke's gospel. Thus, when Jesus looks at the poor, the hungry, and the weeping and sees them as blessed, it is because first of all he is hearing God's voice inside of himself, telling him that God is seeing him and the world in that way. Rolheiser, Ronald. **The Holy Longing**. NY. Doubleday. 1999. Page 239.

Just as the gardener who does not weed his garden chokes his vegetables, so the intellect that does not purify its thoughts is wasting its efforts. St. Thalassios the Libyan

The number 40 holds symbolic connotation of transitional and interim periods of time. The designated periods are not only situated between events, but serve a transformational function. Sacred time is marked by beginning and ending points within which the individual or community is to pass through and be recreated by significant change. (There are 40 mentions of 40 days, years, etc. in the bible) Carson, Timothy L. **Liminal Reality and Transformational Power**. NY, Univ. Press of Amer. 1997. Pages 107-8..

#### SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: [www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B. 2005. Pgs.53-57. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B. 2009. Pgs. 65-68. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2011-12. Pgs. 45-48. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Janice Grana ED. **Images**. St. Mary's College Press. Winona MN 1976.

**OPEN TO THE STORM** Tammy Felton Page 82. **AD LIB** Evelyn Minshull. Page 36. **THE JOURNEY** Mary Eleanor Rice Page 135.

John Shea. **STORIES OF FAITH** Thomas More Press, Chicago. 1980. (Conversation between Jesus and the devil (the thin man) after Jesus' baptism) Pages 187-8)

Bayton, Bishop John. **Marking the Points of Transition**. **Parabola**, Spring 2000. Pages 90ff.

Zaleski, Philip. **The Night Journey of Nicodemus**. **Parabola**, Winter 1998. Pages 61ff.

Meisinger, Hubert. **Sociobiology: The Conversation Continues: Christian Love and Biological Altruism**. **Zygon**, December 2000. Pages 745ff. Quoit, Michael. **Living Words**. Denville, NJ. Dimension Books. 1978. **Jesus in the Desert or the 'Other Aptitude'**. Pages 46ff.