

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



## ***The Church's prayer for this Sunday***

Heavenly Father,  
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,  
and grew closer to you in the desert:  
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer  
that we may witness to your saving love  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021**

### **A reading from 1 Peter 3: 18-end**

<sup>8</sup> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. <sup>19</sup> After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— <sup>20</sup> to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

**For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.**

### **A Gospel reading from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 1: 9-15**

#### **The Baptism and Testing of Jesus**

<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

<sup>12</sup> At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, <sup>13</sup> and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



## **Jesus Announces the Good News**

<sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

**For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.**

---

## **A reflection from Revd Priscilla Slusar, interim lead minister in Haslingfield**

I know that I have been very fortunate in my life to be part of a loving and supportive home and family. This background has helped John and I to pass on this experience to our daughter and, she in turn, has created the same secure home for her family. The present lockdown situation has presented challenges but we know that our secure and loving background of family life will help us to face these difficulties and "ride the storm". Not everyone is so fortunate.

I read a novel a little while ago which focused on a young woman who was abandoned as a baby and never knew her parents. She was brought up in a series of foster homes and children's homes. She watched television programmes or adverts which depicted "perfect" family life and was haunted by her lack of background. She felt that she had no-one to turn to when she faced challenges or when she achieved something positive. She became a social worker so that she could help other young people who faced the same sort of challenges. It sounds like a very depressing story but it wasn't. However, reading this novel made me appreciate the blessings of a stable and loving family.

Today's gospel reading from Mark tells us something about the parent/child relationship between God the Father and Jesus. As Jesus is baptised a voice comes from heaven saying "You are my beloved son; I am pleased with you." It's a wonderful statement of love and pride. Jesus is just about to start his ministry; it's going to be hard, demanding, at times soul-destroying. It must have been so reassuring to hear those words and know that glow of love and pride.

We're not so good in Britain about expressing our feelings or about passing on our sense of pride in our children. But there are times when it is good to be demonstrative.

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Christian gospel teaches us that God feels like that about each one of us, not just Jesus. God speaks to us in the same way that he spoke to Jesus. God looks at us and says "You are my dear child; I'm delighted with you." This is one of the messages that we try to put across at baptism – that God loves us, cares for us, and will remain with us throughout life.

Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one – sent as the Saviour of all people for all time. As the anointed one he becomes a representation of all people before God. What is true of Jesus is true for all his followers.

In Mark's gospel it says that Jesus saw the heavens open and then the Spirit of God descended upon him. It doesn't mean that a little door in the sky opened up! "Heaven" means God's dimension beyond the reality of ordinary life. Instead of being aware of the world around him, Jesus became aware of the presence and wonder of God – like a curtain being pulled back so that the glory of God behind the curtain could be revealed.

We can also glimpse heaven opening before us, but it is hard to hang onto that image and that feeling of the wonder of God's presence. Most of the time we have to live by faith rather than by sight. But today, as we read this gospel story, Mark is reminding us that we can hear the voice of God saying the same thing to us that he said to Jesus. We can listen to the heavenly voice through the ordinariness of our daily lives. We can ponder on those words "You are my dear child; I'm delighted with you" and know that we are precious to God.

After Jesus was baptised he was sent out into the desert to be tempted and then to face the challenges of his ministry. We are also sent out into the world to face the challenges that are ahead of us. There may be challenges in our working lives, challenges in our relationships, financial pressures, or feelings of isolation because of lockdown. Our faith may be tested in a number of ways. There will be times when we have a sense of failure, times when we can't cope with the challenges of doing God's will, times when we feel over-burdened and depressed – but then we have to remember the unconditional love of God. "You are my dear child; I'm delighted with you."

Amen