

## LENT 2021

*For St Peter De Beauvoir, February 2021*

Welcome to the first Sunday of Lent, the 40-day period in the run-up to Easter. In today's powerful Gospel reading from Mark, we see Jesus baptised by John, proclaimed by God to be his son, and then driven into the wilderness.

It's a dramatic scene, and presents us with a vibrant image of the trinity – the Son, Jesus immersed in baptismal waters, God the father, whose voice speaks from Heaven, and the Holy Spirit, driving Jesus into a period of hardship and endurance.

The story provides a starting point for our own Lenten journey, when we are encouraged to imitate Christ and enter our own personal wilderness, removed from comfort zones and old habits.

This year, Lent has an added dimension. Because most of us have been outside our comfort zones, in a kind of Lent, for nearly a year. As we journey through the UK's third lockdown in a worldwide pandemic, our church is closed, as if in a fast. And much of what we once took for granted has been thrown into question.

Humanity it seems has been forced into a period of reassessment, a kind of Lent.

It's as though someone up there pressed a pause button and we've had to stop and perhaps see things for the first time.

In the wilderness of the seemingly endless lockdowns there has been despair, loss, and time to reflect on our individual and collective failings as humans.

The unexpected space and silence have prompted many to ask questions about how we as human beings have been living our lives, and how we might be able to live more wisely.

My favourite line in today's Gospel reading describes the angels waiting on Jesus as he endures his 40 days.

*The angels waited on him.* A sign of hope. The good news of the Kingdom of Heaven is coming.

Traditionally in Lent, fasting is one of the tools we use to shift our consciousness towards the Divine. We often fast by giving up a favourite type of food or some other comfort.

This week, a friend from St Peter's passed me some words, a kind of prayer, from Pope Francis. In these words, Pope Francis suggests a different kind of fasting for Lent that goes very deep.

I will read a few of the lines now:

Francis says:

*Fast from hurting and say kind words*

*Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude*

*Fast from anger and be filled with patience*

*Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope*

*Fast from worries and have trust in God.*

*Fast from grudges, and be reconciled.*

*Fast from words, be silent and listen*

This kind of Lent fast is very attractive. Because in what we give up, we gain so much more.

However, you choose to journey through these 40 days, I wish you a very good Lent.

And let us ask for God's blessings on St Peter De Beauvoir, as it too walks through its own period of wilderness. Removed of its vicar, empty of services, St Peter's awaits new life.

May we, the congregation tend to it in our hearts and prayers.

And when we return, may we do so in good heart, made new by our journey through a Lent like no other. AMEN