

# THE PARISHES OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST AND ST MARY MAGDALENE

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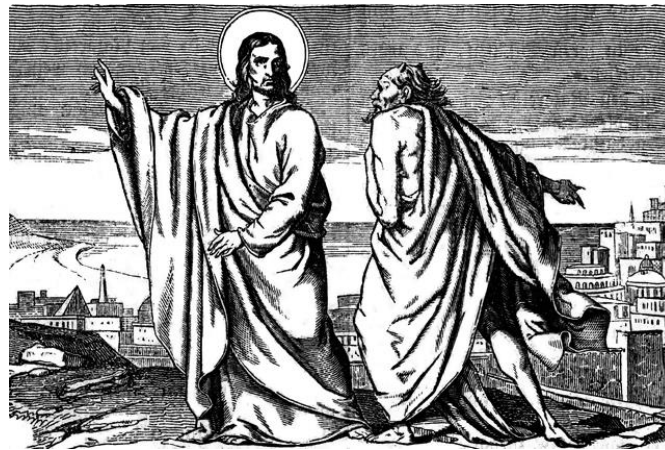
*(Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: 10am to 3pm & Friday 11am-4pm)*

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## *First Sunday of Lent – Sunday 21 February 2021*



*‘The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.’*

**Fr Jock writes:** ‘Lent can sometimes take us by surprise – and especially when it comes rather early as it has done this year. Obviously, with Lockdown still with us, it’s going to be a different kind of Lent to normal, not least because many of us are now much more used to interacting online.

In this newsletter, you can read of various initiatives within the parish and beyond – Eg **Nightly Compline, a group reflecting on mental health, a series of talks** at the Edinburgh Jesuit Centre entitled ‘**What would Pope Francis do?**’ and **Retreats** offered by the Scottish Laity Network, the (Glasgow based) Ignatian Study Centre, the Scottish Redemptorist priest, Fr Denis McBride – as well as of appeals and charities well worth supporting.

**Among other initiatives is a weekly podcast/video (and the option of a Monday night 7pm sharing group via Zoom – see the link on page 3) I will be offering on the Psalms, and particularly the psalms of night prayer.** The Psalms were probably the prayers Jesus knew best - according to the gospels of St Matthew and St Mark, the opening line of one – Psalm 22 – ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’ - was on his lips when he died.

### **Two prayers for the beginning of Lent**

*This Lent -*

*Let your door stand open to receive Christ,  
unlock your soul to him  
offer him a welcome in your mind  
and then you will see the riches of simplicity,  
the treasures of peace,  
and the joy of grace.  
St Ambrose (Adapted)*

Lord, expose me to your light  
that I may pray  
not just in words and phrases,  
not simply with the words of others  
more saintly than myself,  
but from my heart  
that your love may throb within me  
bursting into my life  
so that I may praise you for ever.

**We are also offering material for PRAYER WALKS – see the attachment/handout:**

**Tracy Burgess writes:** *‘We have various different options offered us during Lent – aiming ultimately to know God deeply and hopefully to know ourselves a little better too.*

*One of my favourites is to get outside and embrace God in nature.*

*To walk peacefully with presence and stillness, to be in the moment.*

*I let myself become aware that God is everywhere and in everything and open up my mind and heart to his presence - heart of my heart, spirit of my spirit.*

*Giving myself space to feel loved by God. Breathing God in. Recapturing wonder and expressing gratitude.*

*Sometimes this is enough, to let God in nature sink in like rain and refresh my soul.*

*I can let go of the noise, distractions and anxieties and be reminded of God’s love and presence.*

*At other times I find that using a short text from scripture to meditate on as I walk can deepen my awareness of God.*

*Focusing on key words or phrases repeated over and over can bring clarity and stillness with a deeper communion with the Divine.*

*A favourite that I use is – ‘be still and know that I am God.’ I focus on different parts, immersing myself into being still and knowing God.*

*During lockdown while we are encouraged to go out and get exercise why not combine it with a little walking meditation during Lent.*

*Go outside and appreciate God’s beautiful gift of Nature.’*

### **Benediction during Lent**

**Deacon Eddie writes:** “During Lent, we would like to invite you to join us for twenty minutes or so each Thursday at 7pm for a weekly Benediction service.

A time for some reflection, gentle music and silence as we spend some time in prayer before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

The link is available below and will also be live on Facebook too.”

<https://youtu.be/LLhiYITi9o4>

### **Compline during Lent starting on Ash Wednesday 17 February 2021**

Our sister parishes recently started an online Compline on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. **During Lent Compline will be said every night at 9.15 online on Zoom.**

The prayers take 10 minutes, and you are invited to join in silence 5 minutes before and stay for 5 minutes at the end, if you wish.

*The details for getting into Compline online:*

**Passcode:** compline

**Link to Join Compline on Zoom:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83916544352?pwd=VGIVSnZ5dDhwMGICMEU0eUJscTd1Zz09>

or

Meeting ID: 839 1654 4352 Passcode: compline

If you need help to get online - then please contact the Parish House (0131 669 5447)  
We can give help with using Zoom. If you need help to get a device - pad or computer or to get on the internet we can also help.

**Compline is the final church service of the day** - the word comes from Old French meaning “to complete”. It offers a contemplative time with prayers that emphasizes spiritual peace and holds both what was good and what was hard in that day and in life generally.

**Our online Compline contains:** an introduction; an examination of conscience – giving thanks and asking forgiveness; psalms with accompanying antiphons; a short scripture reading; the responsory; the Cantic of Simeon – Nunc Dimittis; concluding prayer and a blessing; it closes with the antiphon to the Blessed Virgin Mary, ‘Salve Regina’.

**The World Day of Prayer** is on Friday 5 March, and the **SCIAF Stations of the Cross** on Friday 12 March.

## THIS WEEK

(NB It is only possible to attend Mass online)

### Saturday 20 February

6.30pm – St John’s – **Vigil Mass** (livestreamed)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### Sunday 21 February

11.00am – **Mass** (livestreamed from the Prayer Room)

12.15pm – Zoom meeting – ‘**Tea and Coffee after Mass**’ – **Open to all**

To join in over Zoom, go to

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/73207091803?pwd=ZnhLWVVFRWJKa3NOVEdzNUZ1Z1N1UT09>

Meeting ID: 732 0709 1803 Passcode: W4mZ9V

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### Monday 22 February

10.00am – Prayer Room – **Mass** (livestreamed)

2pm – Zoom – **Group reflecting with Sheila Dobson on Mental Health.**

4.30pm – Skype – **PEP meeting**

7-8.15pm – Zoom Meeting – A SHORT TALK BY FR JOCK ON THE PSALMS – followed by a time of

**Sharing and Reflection – Open to All**

To join in over Zoom, go to

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89618568110?pwd=QXoxMVVVWFg5b1N4cEp1dXF2Ump3dz09>

Meeting ID: 896 1856 8110 Passcode: 439655

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### Tuesday 23 February

7.00pm – Prayer Room – **Mass** (livestreamed)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### Wednesday 24 February

10.00am – St John’s – **Requiem Mass for Rita Roberts** (livestreamed)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### Thursday 25 February

10.00am – St John’s – **Mass** (livestreamed)

6.00pm – Zoom – **St John’s Tower Fundraising group meeting.**

7.00pm – **Benediction** (livestreamed from St John’s)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### Friday 26 February -

10.00am - St John’s – **Mass** (livestreamed)

11am - **Rosary Group** – ‘Anyone can join, especially if you have Facebook Messenger, but also on WhatsApp

or just on the phone. Sometimes it takes time for us all to join in, but we always manage. Please join us.  
Message Maria Igoe on 07981333219 or [mariaigoe@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mariaigoe@yahoo.co.uk)'

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### **Saturday 27 February**

6.30pm – St John's – **Vigil Mass** (livestreamed)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

### **Sunday 28 February**

11.00am – **Mass** (livestreamed from the Prayer Room)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

## **The World Day of Prayer is on Friday 5 March.**

'The service this year has been provided by the Christian women of Vanuatu. More information about Vanuatu, the World Day of Prayer and a copy of the booklet for this year's service can be found on the Scottish WDP website ([www.wdpScotland.org.uk](http://www.wdpScotland.org.uk)). A small number of booklets are also available from the Parish House.

Although we cannot hold the usual 'in person' service in one of our PACT churches we are warmly invited to join the Zoom Service on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March at 2pm. It is being hosted by Augustine United Church in Edinburgh with participants expected from across Scotland. For joining details please see the WDP website (link above) or Facebook.

The Scottish Committee have also planned 10 Days of Prayer starting on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February. The 10 days of Prayer will be posted on the Facebook site every morning and on the website. The Committee are inviting the national leaders of 10 denominations to share a Thought for the Day focusing on Vanuatu and one of the Scottish Committee will end with a prayer.'

## **From Archbishop Leo's Weekly Ad Clerum**

**INSPIRE - Lent Talks** - Register now for the Archdiocese's INSPIRE talk series for Lent. Guest speakers will guide you prayerfully through the season. All talks on Zoom, 7-8pm.

TALK 2: *Songs of the Redemption: The Benedictine Liturgy of the Hours*, with Brother Joseph Carron. 7pm, Tue 02 Mar. Register: [bit.ly/LentCarron](http://bit.ly/LentCarron).

TALK 3: *Prayer as a Relationship Reflected in St Teresa of Avila*, with Sr Sally Rollo. 7pm, Tue 16 March. Register: [bit.ly/LentRollo](http://bit.ly/LentRollo)

TALK 4: *Praying the Passion according to St Mark*, with Archbishop Leo Cushley. 7pm, Tue 23 March. Register: [bit.ly/LentCushley](http://bit.ly/LentCushley)

### **Pro-Life Stations of the Cross**

Stations of the Cross, organised by the Archdiocesan Pro-Life Office, will take place each Monday evening of Lent at 7:45pm. The Stations will be followed by a short reflection by one of our priests. You can register now on Eventbrite: <http://standrewsandedinburgh.eventbrite.com>

**Lent resources** - The Archdiocesan Catechetics Commission has produced a range of resources for Lent that will assist adults and children to deepen their understanding of this holy season and aid them in their prayer life. Find them in the resources section at: <https://archedinburgh.org/pastoral-governance/catechetics/>.

The Bishops Conference of Scotland has issued an Ash Wednesday Liturgy and a Stations of the Cross for use at home: <https://www.bcos.org.uk/COVID19/COVIDResources>

**Job Opportunity - SPUC Scotland (Society for the Protection of Unborn Children) has an opportunity for a full-time Communications Officer** (Content Production). The role sits in the Public Affairs Department and helps SPUC to gather and tell stories that captivate, inspire and compel action. For more information and details on how to apply please email [michael@spucscotland.org](mailto:michael@spucscotland.org)

# NOTICEBOARD

*Children's liturgy by Zoom continues for the young people of our parishes. To join us on a Sunday morning at 11:15, please send your contact email address to [lauder.82@btinternet.com](mailto:lauder.82@btinternet.com) along with your name, the children you are including and which Mass you would normally attend. **If you are aware of any families who may like to join us but may not see this notice, do please share with them that they are very welcome.** If you have any questions about Zoom children's liturgy please call Arlene Lauder on 07950880833.*

## **SCIAF WEE BOX CAMPAIGN - LENT 2021** *(including a double-your-money offer)*

In normal circumstances, the Justice & Peace Group would be handing out SCIAF's Wee Boxes on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, along with literature about who the campaign is focusing on, but these are not normal circumstances hence this article.

This year's appeal shines a light on South Sudan where a generation of children with disabilities are locked out of education and trapped in a cycle of poverty. Frequent conflict has left behind a legacy of fear, displacement and despair, making it one of the world's poorest and most fragile states. Children with disabilities were already the most vulnerable in society. Now, the coronavirus pandemic has deepened already existing levels of poverty, putting them at greater risk.

Many children with disabilities in South Sudan are not able to go to school or, later on, to work and earn a living. They may have no access to support services or hospitals for treatment. They may face stigma and exclusion.

With your support, SCIAF, with its local partner in South Sudan, will enable children with disabilities to unlock their potential and live life to the full, providing a lifeline to families and communities affected by extreme poverty; also they will be working with the wider community to promote equality and inclusion and tackle discriminatory attitudes towards people living with disabilities.

In the last two weeks, we have brought you Vaida's story, highlighting the problem she faced and the help that SCIAF's partner in South Sudan was able to give but if you want to read more, go to

<https://www.sciaf.org.uk/get-involved/appeals/557-wee-box-2021>

The bottom line, of course, is that SCIAF can't do it without our help so please donate online or, if you prefer, hand your donation in to the parish house or to any member of the Justice & Peace Group.

**The added attraction this year is that all donations to the Wee Box campaign will be doubled by the UK Government so please take full advantage of this special offer!**

## **POSSIBLE LENTEN RETREATS AND TALKS IN WHICH TO PARTICIPATE**

**FROM THE EDINBURGH JESUIT CENTRE – WHAT WOULD POPE FRANCIS DO?**  
a series of Tuesday evening Lenten Talks Exploring the Key Issues Defining Francis' Papacy.

'To mark the eighth anniversary of Pope Francis' election on 13 March, the Edinburgh Jesuit Centre is delighted to announce a number of prominent Catholic voices exploring the teaching of Pope Francis. Join them each Tuesday in Lent as they delve into some of the key issues that are defining Francis' papacy.'

Tuesday 23 February - 7.30pm - Pope Francis on Social Justice, with **Austen Ivereigh**,  
Tuesday 2 March - 7.30pm - Pope Francis on Refugees & Migration, with **Sr Imelda Poole**  
Tuesday 9 March - 7.30pm - Pope Francis on LGBTQ+, by Ministry, with **James Martin SJ**  
Tuesday 16 March - 7.30pm - Pope Francis on Church Hierarchy, with **Christopher Lamb**  
Tuesday 23 March - 7.30pm- Pope Francis on The Environment, with **Dr Lorna Gold**,  
Tuesday 30 March -7.30pm - Pope Francis - Women in the Church, with **Gemma Simmonds CJ**

Join them on Zoom by following the link - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2365092814>  
Or Google Meeting, ID: 236 509 2814.....They will also be streaming to Facebook Live.

## **The retreat from the Ignatian Spirituality Centre for 2021 is from Ash Wednesday, 17 February, to the First Sunday of Easter, 11 April (but not too late to join)**

'Full details of how to register are at <https://www.iscglasgow.co.uk/lent2021.html>

**Weekly topics include:** Jesus, his prayer and the Father - Jesus' Family and Friends - Jesus' Teachings - Jesus reaches out to the needy - The emotional Jesus - Jesus under Attack - The Resurrected Jesus

**Time for Prayer:** Ideally you should be able to find a time to pray with the Scripture or other material daily; anything from 15 minutes to an hour a day, whatever you find helps you.

**Weekly Meeting:** The idea of this retreat is that groups of people support each other. Each person prays daily individually, and then various groups meet weekly together to see how the prayer has been going. This will support you in your prayer and help you see where God is in your prayer and in your life. It will also introduce you to different ways of praying with Scripture.

**Prayer Materials:** Choose what is most convenient for you: we provide the materials online for a computer or smartphone. Every day there is one passage from Scripture plus 'A Thought for Today', a piece of music and a picture to ponder.

**We also give a few suggestions on how to pray with the day's materials.**

**Reflecting on Prayer;** We suggest that after each day's prayer you jot down in a journal a few notes on how the prayer has gone. This will help your sharing in the group if you have one. It will also be interesting to reflect on how things are moving during Lent and see whether you discern any patterns in the way God is dealing with you.

**The BBC Radio 4 Daily Service** will be taking up the themes of this week. So this will be an additional way to immerse yourself in this retreat.'

### **Lenten Retreat with Fr Denis McBride**

Father Denis McBride will be leading a FREE online retreat this Lent, based on his two books *Reflecting with Paintings* Vol 1 and Vol 2. The retreat will launch on the Redemptorist Publications website on **Wednesday 24 February** when Fr Denis will reflect on '**Praying the Rosary – Old Woman Praying the Rosary by Paul Cézanne.**

### **PRAYER TO ST JOSEPH**

**Maria Igoe writes:** 'On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX's declaration of St Joseph as "Patron of the Universal Church", Pope Francis proclaimed a special '**Year of St Joseph,**' beginning on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception 2020 and extending to the same feast in 2021.

To increase devotion to St Joseph it is hoped to share a prayer or reflection each fortnight, beginning with this favourite of Pope Francis, which he has said every morning for more than 40 years.- "*It expresses devotion and trust, and even poses a certain challenge to Saint Joseph,*" the Holy Father reflects. He explains that it is taken from a 19th-century French prayer book of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary.

**'Glorious Patriarch Saint Joseph, whose power makes the impossible possible, come to my aid in these times of anguish and difficulty.**

**Take under your protection the serious and troubling situations that I commend to you, that they may have a happy outcome.**

**My beloved father, all my trust is in you. Let it not be said that I invoked you in vain, and since you can do everything with Jesus and Mary, show me that your goodness is as great as your power. Amen.'**

Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline (24 hours)

☎0800 027 1234

### **PARISH REGISTER**

**Please pray for those who have died recently: June Ross and Jacqueline Didsbury**

**Please pray for those whose anniversaries occur around this time: Gerry Wynne, Mary Robertson, John Dunn, Una O'Reilly, Rita Wright, Kevin Crow and Gerry Power sr.**

**St John's Feb.20:-** Margaret Wood (2001); Catherine McGovern (1970); John McCann (1915); Helen Mackersey; **Feb.21:-** John Meagher (1999); Michael McCreadie (1997); **Feb.22:-** Wanda Kosok (2015); John Dunn (2014); John Walsh (1993); **Feb.23:-** John Hughes (1990); **Feb.24:-** Josephine Broadley (2006); Mary McPartlin (1989); Luisa Iannarelli (1978); Richard Rooney; Charles Wynne; **Feb.25:-** Agnes Watters (1999); Thomas Robb (1997); Mary Young (1903); James Hanlon; James Keegan; **Feb.26:-** Betty Rope (2009); Mary Green (2006); Helen Molloy (1968); Bridget Meehan (1958); Edward Magee (missing 1944); Filomena Perilla;

**St Mary Magdalene's Feb.20:-** Anne Wallace (2008); **Feb.21:-** Elizabeth Mulvanny (1996); Sarah O'Neill (1993); **Feb.22:-** Mary Robertson (2016); **Feb.24:-** Mary Coll (2004);

**Sick Parishioners - St. John's:** Joyce Martin, Raymond Gandy, Ruth Visor, Gena Gallagher, Isabel Murie, Alex Telford, Mary Grady, Susan Cammach, Pauli Walker, Dolores Jones, Bill Laidlaw, Ian Thompson, Nora Bruce, Evelyn Oldershaw, Anna Butler, May Flynn, Vincent Knowles, John Cregan, young Saoirse Golden, John Whyte, Chloe Sutherland, Frances Cunningham, David Reid, Sheila Tansey, Frank Logan, Charlotte McGregor, Betty Dougal, Anne Thomson, Eileen Brown, Mike Noonan, Sarah McManus, Patricia Lawler, Mike Burns, Sr Jennifer Lindsay, Ernie Moran, Maureen Low, Pat Hunter, Alan Blyth, Mary Slight, Mary Phair, Rose Thornton, Kitty Dykes, Norman Telfer, Philip Jamieson, Alf MacNamara, Stan McKay, Maureen Lawrie, Kathie Gallagher, Erin Corbett, Roz Byers, Marie Angela Crolla and Lorraine Syme.

**Sick Parishioners - St. Mary Magdalene's:** Jim Gallagher, Chris and Louise English, Jacqueline Marinello, Sheila and George Service, Ray Donnelly, Sam Burns, Clive Davis, Ella Ayers, Isobel Phillips, Denis Davidson, Margaret Duffy, Maria Scott Jnr, Louise Gorman, Ann Dockrell, John Prior, John Newell, Michael McPhillips, Bridget Malone, Charles Malcolm, Margaret Ryan, Jacqueline Hannan, Julie Keegan, Rose McKay, Laurie Wallace, Annie Watson, David O'Donnell, Andrew Banks, Jude Ferguson, and Mary & James Muir.

**Please pray for sick friends and relatives of parishioners, including:** Annabel Certvantes, Rose Renwick, Nan Doig, Bridie Hanlon, Sharon Henderson, Rachel Kennedy, Leo Stone, Diego Dinis, Gavin Findlay, Peter Bickmore, baby Baxter Sweeney, Sr May Lewis, Joan Murray Hamilton, Sr Margaret Mary, Billy McPhillips, Anthony Finnerty, Angela McGuigan, Jean Nelson, Margaret Anne Marton, Anne Harty, Betty Blyth, Lauren Fitzpatrick, Fr Christy Fox, Joe Greenan, Martin Carr, Michael Igoe, baby Josh Simpson, Katie McAnenny, Robert Shaw, baby Kinsley McMillan, baby Francesca Horwood, John Walsh, Linda McKean, Moira McConville, Kathleen Kay, Margaret and Victoria Roddam, John Williams, Clare Richardson, Karen MacKay, Laura Anderson, Gloria Crolla, Richard Reid, James O'Rourke, Tommy Muir, Janice Todd, Lauli Ridge, Jan Meise, Seval Kazimoglu, Anne Young, James Shepherd, Carla Zanetti, Peter Hanley, Jennifer Kay, Janie Low, Ranier Carpo, William Young, Marie Baird, Andrew Franklin, Frank Palmer, Paul Henderson, Ellen Green, Andrew Preston, Jamie Mitchell, Eunice Macdonald, Peter Bromley, Audrey Burgess, Kathleen Cawley, Margo Law, Misia Jack, Hannah Muldoon, Emma Bromet, Edward Caulfield, Mike Enfield, Sharon Anderson, Igor Rekowski, Diana Hibbert, Roksan Moczulstra, Joan Brooks, Mary Turnbull, Stuart Falconer, Jake Jorden and young Ray Donovan Syme

**Offertory Collections – 14 February 2021**



St Mary Magdalene	St John the Evangelist
<b>£110.00 total</b> as Offertory	<b>£1546.80 total</b> including Offertory of £20.00, Gift Aid of £579.80 and £947.00 Online Donations

**Many thanks and warm wishes to Alan Whyte who is stepping down from looking after the Cubs in St John's, having taken over from Ernie Moran more than twenty years ago. He has been involved with the Cubs for three decades, for the last fifteen years travelling in every Tuesday evening from Penicuik to do so...**

**Mary Iannarelli writes: ‘The Saint Vincent De Paul Conference would like give grateful thanks to parishioners for their exceptional generosity particularly in the last very challenging months. Thanks to you we have been able to support many families and individuals with their everyday needs throughout the year as well as helping them to celebrate Christmas with loved ones.’**

**Next Sunday is the fourth Sunday of the month – and therefore the monthly collection for the St John's Tower Fund.**

**St Mary Magdalene 200 Club Draw – PLEASE SIGN UP FOR 2021**

**Jean McNally writes:** ‘As they say, “you’ve got to be in it to win it”! If you would like to continue your subscription for another year or if you would like to join for the first time, we would be very glad of your support. Every participant has a unique number allocated to them at the very reasonable cost of £1 per month (£12 for the year). This payment entitles you to be included in each draw for prize money. You can own as many numbers as you wish as long as you pay for each - this obviously raises your chance of winning as all your allocated numbers will be included for each draw. We recognise that due to COVID restrictions, even when our church is open, not everybody is able to attend church on a Sunday and therefore may find it difficult to pay their subscription up front. We are happy to consider various options on how we collect the funds so don't be put off from participating. Please contact Madge Moyes on 0131 657 2744 to confirm your continuation for 2021 or to become a new member and agree how payments will be made. You can still commit even if you cannot pay on the day - we trust you to get the funds to us at some point in 2021. To alleviate the pressure of time constraints in launching the 2021 Draw we propose to extend the sign-up period to late February and draw the January and February prizes both at the end of February, so nobody need miss out on being included in the January draw...Thanking you all for the support you have shown in the past and looking forward in anticipation of your continued support for the future.’

# A REFLECTION ON THE GOSPEL FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT - Mark 1: 12-15

I suppose it could be argued that the last thing we need right now is 6 weeks of extra prayer, almsgiving and self-denial. Here in the UK, we have been through weeks of privation and denial as a result of the various lockdowns imposed and endured. Some have learnt new skills, developed and furthered existing ones and there is only so many times that you can clear and reorganise wardrobes and kitchen cupboards. Yes, in some ways, it will be difficult to focus on Lent this year!

We started this new year right at the beginning of Mark's Gospel and this weekend we're back there. We are presented with a noticeably short Gospel passage to commence our Lenten sojourn. Mark tells us quite simply that with only wild beasts and angels for company, Jesus goes into the wilderness to pit his wits against Satan. We can easily visualise the wild animals – and they posed little or no threat - but Mark still feels it important to draw our attention to the fact that Jesus was, if you like, beginning a period when he identified with the natural world around him. He will have felt the searing heat of the midday sun and the chill of the night so much a feature of the wilderness once the sun has set. As he lay in the stillness and darkness, his senses will have developed a heightened awareness of the creatures who thrive on and enjoy the stillness and blackness of the night.

Many years ago, when I was in my early to mid-twenties, I was invited to spend three nights in the middle of Kielder Forest here in Northumberland. Deprived of a tent we were each given a sleeping bag with a plastic sheet should we need it: big enough to protect the bag from rain, but not sufficient to build a shelter. Everyone had to be at least twenty yards apart. There were no comforting cups of tea around a campfire nor was conversation allowed. All we had for comfort was a star filled canopy above and the sounds of animals and insect creeping around beside us and going about their own business of survival. The first night was very, very long – the third less so but at the end of the exercise few of us wanted the quietude to end for we were indeed in the midst of something incredibly 'holy'. We have cheapened somewhat that word 'holiness' and it is sometimes difficult to put our finger on what is meant by it. All I do know is that when I come into contact with holiness, words become meaningless and irrelevant - all that is required is a willingness to 'feel' it. Jesus, almost certainly, will have enjoyed the exact same experience.

And what of those angels? Angels seem to be everywhere in the New Testament, and they always accompany a message or revelation from God – whether Gabriel's visitation of Mary or the angels appearing to the shepherds in the hills, instructing them to head off to Bethlehem. Angels are messengers and we do them a disservice if we only see them as beings in white with a pair of wings thrown in! I have shared numerous times that we encounter many angels during our lifetime - and who is a messenger if not someone who conveys information, awareness, insight. The angels that were the companions of Jesus in the wilderness are Mark's way of conveying the essential truth about being in a relationship with God as loving Creator.

We are involved in a process of self-discovery. Our primary messenger is our individual conscience, as well as those with whom we share our lives. This is the purpose of heading off into the wilderness, even when that wilderness is Flat3B, at the top of Montague Street or wherever we live. During the isolation of lockdown, I have learned a great deal about myself. I have learned the full extent of my impatience and tendency to irritability as I field yet another 'phone call offering me life insurance or assistance in claiming on my car insurance for an accident I cannot recall – because it never happened. I remind myself that the caller is doing a (thankless) job in return for a (minimum) wage and does not really need or deserve my rudeness. I have learned to be kind and patient. Did I receive a prompt from an angel – or did I learn it from the voice of stillness that dwells deep within my soul? The voice I hear when I head off into my own 'Keilder Forest'. My faults are not the same as yours. My potential for improvement different, too. All that matters is that when I receive a message, I learn from the insight on offer..... and act accordingly!