

## **LENT 2:** Born of God: God's event - our participation (Focusing on God)

Lent is (or can be) a challenging time. It can be a wilderness journey of reflection... soul searching... and God experiencing. So we begin our Lenten Journey Lent is about honesty in our reflection on life, and faith; in addressing our doubts and fears; about entering into prayerfulness and God seeking; and it's about questioning and renewal.

*When was the last time your faith took a major turn or change or you experienced some great new revelation?*

Lent can be a walk with the disciples; with them we observe and listen to Jesus. At the same time this can be a walk with Jesus; with him we share in his temptations, doubts and fears, and we share in his hopes and prayers. This will be a faith journey and we wonder if our faith will sustain us.

During Lent we follow Jesus into the wilderness for some soul searching, we ask some big questions of God, we ask some big questions of ourselves, we reconsider life and the meaning of life, and the meaning of *my life*.

In the wilderness what is important will come sharply into focus and what is insignificant will scurry away. In the wilderness we will face some uncomfortable truths: perhaps about ourselves; we will face some scary truths – perhaps about our faith; we will face some new challenges – that may upset us and test us to the limit.

What new things will God say? Are we like those of old who prayed: "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more" (Deut. 18:16).

**Prayer...** "Father God, you eternally give your Spirit to your Son, you forever offer all that is yours to him without reservation, hesitation or restraint. And you give your own Spirit to us. You led us to here to this day and to this place. 'Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me in this wilderness journey.' Assure me that you are with me. Let me know your voice among the many others. We open ourselves to your Spirit, to be guided by your will for our lives, to be followers of your Son, and to reveal your grace, welcome, love and forgiveness in our words and actions. AMEN."

### **Scripture Reading: Matthew 3: 1-17 (an outpouring of the Holy Spirit)**

#### **Sharing: Share these with each other as you are able:**

Reflect upon your own experience of God's Spirit.

We begin by reflecting upon the way we look for and find God.

How do you hear God in the hustle and bustle of life?

How do you hear God through his word in the Bible?

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Sometimes people talk a lot in prayer so that they may not hear the voice of the Lord. How do you listen for God in prayer?

Are there times when you deliberately withdraw to look for, find and hear God's word to you?

**Question:** What words of scripture have informed you about God's Spirit? Share these together and share what they mean to you – note the differences of experience and interpretation. Not everyone reads the event in the same way and not everyone experiences God in the same way. We don't always express our similar experience in the same way. Isn't this what we find in the Bible with so many experiences of so many people, over thousands of years?

**Genesis...** God the Holy Spirit and Lifegiver – Life is a gift from God – a sharing in God's life (a sharing in God's own breath/ Spirit). Consider from Jeremiah, "You formed me in the womb."

**King Cyrus...** (Isaiah 45: 1-6) God's Spirit in the unexpected... Cyrus was a pagan king, yet referred to as 'God's king, my son, my servant' yet Cyrus does not know God, what do you think of this? We like to think we know to whom God gives his Spirit. We like it neat. We might think there is a formula to follow. Jesus spoke of the Spirit like the wind blowing where it will. Can you accept God's breadth?

**Judges: Samson...** Reflect upon how God the Spirit empowers us. When have you felt empowered by God's Spirit? Share what it means to know the 'power of God' in your life. And, remember 'the power Jesus revealed' was not to call down fire upon his enemies, not to enter Jerusalem triumphant but humble and riding on a donkey, Jesus did not call upon a thousand agents to consume his enemies, he forgave them. What is this power of God that he reveals... power to forgive? The power of God to forgive is arguably one of the greatest revelations of Jesus and the gospel. Not everyone welcomes this in the gospel and not everyone welcomes this today.

**Elijah / Elisha...** awesome dramatic presence and quiet presence.

1 Kings 19: Then the word of the Lord came to him [Elijah], saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' 10He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' 11He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

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**Isaiah...** God reveals a purpose for Isaiah and for Israel. How do we find God's purpose for us? How do we deal with *being led by God* in ways we do not want to go... for example... "Father if possible let this cup pass from me, yet not my will be done but yours..." What about when we are asked to forgive our enemies... is that the Spirit's way? What about going the extra mile... is that the Spirit's way?

**Jesus:** reveals a closeness of God's Spirit in his own life. He offers new insights into the activity of God's Spirit. We are said to share in something similar as we are "**born again**" of God. John 1: "who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." Is this experience the same for everyone? Some say they have had an Emmaus Road experience rather than a Damascus Road experience – they realised God with them along the way, not suddenly.

**Nicodemus** (a teacher of the Law) was confused... today's confusion is often around the belief that we instigate this rebirth. "Who were born, not of blood *or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man*, but of God."

No one lives or breathes without God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit: **the Sustainer**. Don't we wish sometimes that God would no longer sustain some – the terrorist for example? If God's Spirit sustains all of life how should we regard all of life – everything that has life?

**Pentecost:** Pentecost season is coming, the great gift of God's Spirit... a great outpouring. This would change much Old Testament belief. God's Spirit was poured out upon Gentiles.

What is this new thing? How would you respond to God giving his Spirit in this way to those you believe are not included? Peter certainly objected.

**Jesus breathed on his disciples** suggesting that he has the power to give the Holy Spirit.

Who has the power to give the Holy Spirit?

In this giving of the Spirit by Jesus what are the disciples telling us about Jesus? What would the disciples make of this?

Jesus gives the Holy Spirit: Mark 1: 4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Jesus promises **the Comforter**... what Comfort does the Holy Spirit offer?

**Prayer...** (To be read slowly) "Loving God, only because you reveal yourself to us do we know you. Such knowledge of you is too great for us. This Lent we share with Jesus as you search our heart and as we look for your Spirit in our wilderness. Help us to resist temptation, to go your way, to love without limit, to be strengthened by your Spirit that we might forgive as our Lord forgives. Your Spirit is with us now and will be with us always – through your Spirit we are united with you never to be divided. And we worship you.

**The grace... AMEN**