

2nd SUNDAY OF LENT**ST. PETERS ANGLICAN CHURCH BUNDOORA****Sunday 1st March 2026****Fr. Stephen Monsiegnur****Readings:**¹ Genesis 12:1-4a / Psalm 121 / Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 / John 3:1-17**Theme:** *Setting Out from the Desert***Genesis 12:1-4a**

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

Psalm 121**Assurance of God's Protection*****A Song of Ascents.***

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
- ² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
- ³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- ⁴ He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- ⁵ The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
- ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day
nor the moon by night.
- ⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- ⁸ The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the

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adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

¹⁶ For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’

SERMON

Jesus, freshly baptised and named the beloved Son, was led into the desert to discern what this identity truly meant. In that stark landscape, every competing voice was stripped away until only the father’s remained. Our Lenten journey began by our selves being placed in that same place of honesty—a place where if we are really open to the experience beyond the ritual, illusions fall, truth is clarified, and trust is tested.

But, we are not to be left in this place as if lost. As we enter the second week of Lent, we are called to consider what happens *after* the desert. What does it mean to walk forward in faith once God has named us, claimed us, and called us beloved? How will we be affected, what will change?

In Genesis, Abram stands at the edge of an unknown future. God’s call is simple and unsettling: “Go... to the land that I will show you.”² Like Jesus leaving the Jordan, Abram steps into a future shaped not by certainty but by trust. Twentieth-century theologians often described this as a baptismal moment—a leaving behind of the old life and a surrender to God’s promise (Barth, 1969). Baptism, in this sense, is not merely a ritual but a reorientation. It is God saying, “Walk with me into what you cannot yet see.”

Psalm 121 becomes the pilgrim’s companion. As we move from the desert into the long road of discipleship, we lift our eyes—not to our own strength or spiritual performance, but to the One who “will keep your going out and your coming in.”³ Baptism assures us that our journey is held by God’s faithfulness, not our own perfection.

² Genesis 12:1

³ Psalm 121:8

Paul, in Romans 4, reminds us that Abram’s righteousness came not from achievement but from trust—faith reckoned as relationship rather than reward. Rahner (1962) emphasised that baptism is fundamentally God’s act: the moment we are “grasped by God,” drawn into divine life before we can earn or prove anything. Barth (1969) insisted that baptism is our grateful response to grace already given. Both perspectives echo Paul’s conviction that faith begins with God’s initiative.

Then in the Gospel, we meet Nicodemus—coming at night, carrying questions, unsure how to reconcile what he knows with what he senses God is doing. Jesus invites him into new birth, a life “born from above.”⁴ Schillebeeckx (1963) saw this new birth as connected to Jesus’ own desert testing: a stripping away of false identities, a clarifying of vocation, a deepening of trust. Baptism, then, is not only a beginning but a continual returning—again and again—to the truth of who we are in God. Every time we confess our faith and receive forgiveness, we step once more into that new birth.

Our deserts today may not be made of sand, but they are no less real. We navigate a world that rewards outrage over compassion, productivity over presence, image over integrity. We carry private anxieties, communal burdens, and subtle temptations to secure ourselves, prove ourselves, or elevate ourselves. Yet the voice that called Jesus “Beloved” calls us still.

Lent invites us to step out from the desert with renewed clarity, renewed with God. Trusting like Abram, lifting our eyes like the psalmist and resting in grace like Paul. It is the opportunity, the place to seek a new birth like Nicodemus, with the assurance that we do not walk alone. The Spirit who led Jesus into the desert now leads us forward—not to break us, but to free us; not to burden us, but to bless us so that we can be his ambassadors to the world.

So we set out again, carrying the desert’s honesty into the journey ahead, trusting that the God who calls us beloved will keep our going out and our coming in.

Let us pray,

God of promise, guide our steps as we leave the desert. Renew our trust, deepen our courage, and lead us into the life you desire for us in Christ our Lord. Amen.

REFERENCES

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Rahner, K. (1962). Theological investigations: Vol. 2. Man in the Church (K.-H. Kruger, Trans.). Darton, Longman & Todd.
(Original essays published 1954–1961.)

⁴ John 3:3

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(Original work published 1960.)