



# Church of the Epiphany

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## FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Lent 1 • Cloudcroft, New Mexico • March 9, 2025



### Collect for Lent 1

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations, and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### Readings for Lent 1

Deuteronomy 26:5-11  
Psalm 91:9-16  
Romans 10:4-13  
Luke 4:1-13

### Lord, walk with us ever closer this season of Lent.

Good morning! And welcome to Lent 2025. I realize that most of us are keenly aware of what Lent is about, but a review is always useful and sometimes essential. Many preachers feel it is *compelled* on the First Sunday of Lent. So, even if you were here on Ash Wednesday, I invite you to read and re-read, and then reflect on, the invitation to a Holy Lent. You will find it on pp. 543-4 of the BCP.

Basically, Lent is part of the preparation for Holy Week and Easter - the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection. It is a season of penitence and fasting, so that, as the Prayer Book says, we are "put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior." They go together, penitence and fasting and pardon and absolution. They are essential parts of one message, and that one message proceeds from the heart of God. It is part of the outward flow of limitless love that God has for us. Historically, confession of sin followed by pardon and absolution has been included in Christian worship since well before the publication of the first Prayer Book in 1549. So we are not re-inventing anything by doing Lent in the way that we do it. But there are always those who will claim that since this is a Christian country we live in, and since we are mostly good people, everyone in the USA will go to Heaven anyway. You may know some folks who believe that and even teach that. So maybe we really do need Lent more than we realize. Perhaps there is some real, solid sin still lurking within us. Nowadays, we often jest about sin and talk around it, but

when it comes right down to it, I fear that most of us are actually in denial about sin. To risk probing a little deeper, I might even say that we would much rather talk about sin in general, or the sin of our neighbors, or the sin of the culture or of the other political party or of our nation or some other nation, than to talk about the sin in our very own lives. But that's what we are called to examine carefully in the season of Lent.

Thankfully, we who believe and are forgiven receive the gifts of joy and peace and the promise of eternal life. But those gifts and that forgiveness came at great cost to God, the cost of the suffering and death of His only begotten Son. We dare not trivialize what that cost God. But that's what we do when we minimize or deny the problem of sin. All too often, we tend to visualize the Cross as being made out of toothpicks and popsicle sticks instead of railroad ties and light poles. When you think about it, even our general confession on Sundays is pretty generic - we don't do much more than to acknowledge the imperfections of our love for God and for one another. So the reality is that the denial of sin in our lives is a serious problem. I suspect we all understand the problem of denial in the diseases of alcoholism and addiction. Denial in that usage means that the alcoholic or addict is rendered blind by the disease and is unable to see the truth of his or her condition. Denial, however, is really nothing new and has never been limited to addictive diseases. It goes back to the Garden of Eden when Satan told Eve, "You will not die," and she believed him! Think about it, look around you. The difficulty is far greater than just the pain of taking an honest look at ourselves and our culture. Sin literally blinds us to the truth, leading us deeper and deeper into denial. Ask yourselves, as messed up as people are in our world today, why aren't more troubled people flocking in droves to the foot of the Cross? If, as Paul wrote in Romans 10, verse 9, which we read today, being saved is as simple as confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, why are there so many empty seats in this and other churches on Sunday mornings? Could it be that we are in denial? Could it be that our

excuses, our rationalizations, our self-justifying responses, all show how sin-sick we really are, how deep-seated the denial really is. More self-focus won't help with that. Only God-focus will. Only He can break through the denial. Regrettably, social media is often part of the problem and not part of the solution.

Even so, we all acknowledge that Jesus confronted, dealt with, and defeated the power of sin and death on the Cross at Calvary. Before that, at the beginning of His ministry, as we read in today's Gospel, He faced three great temptations in the wilderness: the temptation to be relevant, the temptation to be spectacular, and the temptation to be powerful. Turn the stones into bread, leap off the pinnacle of the temple, be king of the whole world. It is unlikely that we will ever face such grand temptations, and it's a good thing we won't. We have trouble enough loving God and loving our neighbors. For example, think for just a moment about those relationships which we nurture, and those we don't, and then think about why there is a difference. That's another part of the homework assignment for all of us, and it is a challenging one. Think about those relationships which we nurture and those we don't and prayerfully reflect on why there is a difference.

So, yes, on this first Sunday of Lent I am concerned that we are in denial about sin and about the power of sin and death in our lives. Satan is as busy today as he was in the Garden of Eden and as he was in the Judean wilderness with Jesus. Note the last verse of the Gospel reading, where Luke tells us that Satan ". . . departed from Him until an opportune time." Most folks connect that "opportune time" with the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus struggled with the immediate prospect of dying a painful death on the Cross. Satan always looks for an opportune time. Now consider this. Satan has convinced many of us today that we are OK. I'm OK, you're OK. And even when I'm not OK, it's not my fault. And even when it is my fault, I'm surely not as bad as that person down the street, or that person who is homeless, or

that person who is in jail, or that person who is so obviously different from me. There are many in the world today, many in this country today, who still say Jesus is the problem, crucify Him. We know that He is *not* the problem. We know that He is the solution. Yet we continue to wallow in minimization and denial of the power of sin. If we in the church don't start standing up for Jesus, it will become an opportune time for Satan indeed!

During Lent, especially during Lent, we are called to see ourselves as Jesus sees us and to admit how powerless we are and how much we really need Him. Only God-focus can help give us a God-perspective. Lent can also be a time when we can begin to let others whom we trust help in holding us accountable. Those who neglect or refuse to be truthful with us are kind of like those who keep sheltering the addict or the alcoholic. They are called enablers. We have all heard that friends don't let friends drive drunk. Well, friends don't let friends die in their sin either. But here's the kicker. We must approach that, first and foremost, with an overriding, deeply loving concern for our brother and our sister. For when we begin by condemning their sin, we are pointing our fingers the wrong way. We are acting like those who brought before Jesus the woman caught in adultery. Jesus told them all, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone." The Gospel calls us to be dropping stones and opening arms of love and reconciliation, even as we are passionately calling the world to repentance.

My prayer is that this Lent will be for us a time like none other, when the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ comes crashing to the forefront of our lives so that we are *compelled* to confess our deepest and darkest sin and let His shed blood cleanse us from all unrighteousness, setting us free forever. We are to bring our real, solid sin to the foot of the Cross so that Jesus might give us His real, solid righteousness. Jesus won the ongoing battle against temptation and against sin and against Satan. It is now up to us to let Him win the battle for our hearts and for our minds and for our souls, that He might empower us to do the same. We will still have to deal with temptation and sin, but he has

promised to walk with us every step of the way. That's the Good News today, on the first Sunday of Lent 2025.

AMEN. Fr. Frank

### **Prayer List - 3/9/25**

The Church of Our Lord, Albuquerque  
Bishop Harold Trott , Rev. Michael Kline

Bishop Steven and Tricia

ADSW Clergy Conference  
March 13-15

### **Those who need your healing care and strength:**

Donya Conine  
Wayne Conine Jr.  
Walter Ford  
Carolyn and Frank Wilson  
Elijah Nix  
Luis and Kelle Senge  
Baby Julius Taylor  
Ellie  
Rev. Shelby Moon  
Esther, Joel Fyock , Lydia Tran  
Rev. Elias Rosales Mendes

### **Those in the Armed Forces:**

Dominick Rankin, US Army, Ft. Bliss, TX  
Gabriella Murley, Ft. Bliss, TX  
Mason Gregg, Camp Courtney, Okinawa  
Creed Napier, US Air Force,  
J.W. Grove, US Navy  
Nicholas Tran, Joint Base Lewis-McChord  
Shawn Zima, Hong Kong  
Wyatt Green, US Navy  
Emma Skidmore, US Navy, OCS

### **We pray for our Epiphany family:**

Fred and Nancy Griffin and family  
Bill Haynes  
Scott and Lisa Schwandt  
Susan and John Scott  
Wally Skidmore

**Lessons for Lent 1**  
**March 9, 2025**  
Anglican Lectionary  
year C

**Old Testament Reading**  
**Deuteronomy 26:5-11**

**5** "And you shall make response before the Lord your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. **6** And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. **7** Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. **8** And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror,[a] with signs and wonders. **9** And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. **10** And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God. **11** And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.

**Psalms 91:9-16**

9 Because you have said, "the LORD is my refuge," \*  
and have made the Most High your stronghold,  
10 There shall no evil happen to you, \*  
neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.  
11 For he shall give his angels charge over you, \*  
to keep you in all your ways.  
12 They shall bear you in their hands, \*  
that you hurt not your foot against a stone.

13 You shall tread upon the lion and adder; \*  
the young lion and the serpent you shall trample under your feet.

14 "Because he has set his love upon me,  
therefore  
I will deliver him; \*  
I will lift him up, because he has known my Name.

15 He shall call upon me, and I will hear him; \*  
indeed, I am with him in trouble; I will deliver him and bring him honor.

16 With long life I will satisfy him, \*  
and show him my salvation."

**New Testament Reading**  
**Romans 10:4-13**

**4** For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. **5** For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. **6** But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) **7** "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). **8** But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); **9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. **11** For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." **12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **13** For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

## The Holy Gospel

### Luke 4:1-13

**4/1** And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness **2** for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. **3** The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." **4** And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" **5** And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, **6** and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. **7** If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." **8** And Jesus answered him, "It is written,

"You shall worship the Lord your God,  
and him only shall you serve."

**9** And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, **10** for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,  
to guard you,'

**11** and "'On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

**12** And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" **13** And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

