



**Sunday Lent 1**

# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Called to abide in and shelter in God**

**Psalm 91 - Luke 4:1-13**

*You who live in the shelter of **ELYON**,  
who abide in the shadow of the **ALMIGHTY**,  
<sup>2</sup> will say to **YHWH**, 'My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust.'*

<sup>3</sup> *For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;*

<sup>4</sup> *he will cover you with his pinions,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*

<sup>5</sup> *You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,*

<sup>6</sup> *or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.*

## ***Psalm 91- Living under God:***

It is impossible to remain quiet about this psalm set for today's readings. It is, without doubt, one of the more exhilarating and hope inspiring psalms in the whole of the psalter.

The image the psalmist uses are so easily taken and applied to just about any human moment of darkness, pain, loss or fear. Its focus remains on God and the commitment God has made to those who come to him with a *humble and contrite heart*.

**The setting** is the sanctuary and the psalmist found himself making a confession of thanksgiving to God. This is someone who has experienced divine salvation. And,

having experienced that divine power of love and mercy he is now in a position to give witness to others who find themselves in similar situations...*I have been there and this is where I found salvation!!*

The Hebrew word for **hiding place or refuge** was the technical language used of the Temple sanctuary which was shown to be operating under the spread wings of the Cherubim and so of Yahweh. It is important to note how the psalmist's name for God is **Shaddai** and **Elyon** variations of **God Almighty**.

## ***What these Holy Names of God tell us***

What the psalmist has come to realize, to experience and understand in his own life is the way the saving God of Israel's history, God who has revealed his name to be **Yahweh - I Am = I Am who I Am now, who I have always been and who I always will be into the future** - is alongside of him as **Elyon** and **Shaddai**. We generally translate these names into English as **The Most-High God** or **God Almighty**. That is the **God-with-all-mighty-power**. There is no other God like the God of Israel, the Creator of all, a **Mighty Warrior**, the **All-Wise God**, all **Loving**, all **Caring**, **Merciful**, **Just** and **all-Powerful** God of heaven and earth. This is the God filling him with such a confident and exuberant hope.

The psalmist brings this God together with **YHWH**, the God who is passionately engaged with his children on a daily, personal level in human history. This is the God who has "come down" and is with his people. Divine power and proximity are what fill this person with hope in even the darkest and most terrible of moments. All they need to do is to accept the invitation to *live in, abide in, taker shelter in* the presence of God and the **All-mighty YHWEH** will do the rest.

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## *One does not live by bread alone*

As a young man I always struggled with the idea of Jesus being tempted. I understood temptation, as a young male I had plenty of those and could not imagine Jesus having to endure the same kinds of things. But the verb *to tempt* has a different meaning in the Bible and the evangelist is using it in a very important way. It is not that Jesus is being encouraged to commit moral sins. What we see is how he is being *put to the test*—by Satan, the original meaning of the Greek word used here. It is about him being given the opportunity to choose to look after himself first or to please God. Will Jesus opt for ministry on his own terms or will he obey the Father in all things, even when obedience comes at a cost?

The best parallel we have for what is happening here is the biblical tradition of the People of Israel, who, having been liberated from Egypt, were put to the test in the Sinai desert. They failed God who was trying to shape them into his own people before leading them into the promised land.

Now Jesus was representing his people and it is his turn to face up to the challenges and the tests the devil was putting before him, as he prepared to begin his mission to bring all of God's people out of the "wilderness" of sin into, not a land of milk and honey, but into the fullness of a life of blessing under the Rule of God his Heavenly Father.

**Turn this stone into a loaf...**  
**Worship me and I will give you...**  
**Throw yourself down...**

### *Satan's temptation: "Its really all about you".*

Israel's struggles during their wilderness wanderings were all about whether or not they were willing and prepared to trust in God to get them to the land of Milk and Honey. Like Adam and Eve before them, they were prepared to accept God but thought they could improve on the divine plan and so make it more comfortable, more acceptable to their own ideas of their place in the universe. One great little English word sums it all up – *hubris!* They showed an insolence that stemmed from human pride. In the Greek traditions, it is nothing but an active defiance of the gods. As we know better approach to life.

*Turn these stones to bread* is Satan's way of telling Jesus that his hunger is causing him suffering because his Father is not looking after him, or has forgotten him and left him to his own devices. He should, therefore, use his powers to feed himself so he is strong enough for his ministry. Unlike Israel, Jesus responds by committing himself to an absolute reliance on and trust in God. All he is and all he has been sent to carry out will be under God's loving guidance.

*Worship me and I will...* The empty promises of the world and all it has to offer! Satan simply cannot deliver because despite his boasts, the world is not his to give to Jesus. This is just the same as the promises of better health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, peace, joy, by pursuing and accumulating the "things" (goods) of this world. The devil is putting himself forward as the god of the world and as a god is worthy of worship. But Jesus responds with a declaration that life comes from God, is to be lived under God and will one day return to God. God remains his primary and only source of these things.

*Throw yourself down from the Temple roof...* This should be a very familiar temptation. How many times have we believers found ourselves in the position of seeking to remind God of our faith credentials and the things we have "sacrificed" for his Church and in pursuit of Gospel faithfulness? *I have done x y and z for you God, so now could you please do a b and c for me?* It is the kind of thinking that convinces us how in some way, God owes us something because we are believers and follow his Son and have been doing Church things for most of our lives. Yes, Jesus is God's Son, but he is not going to be tricked into asking his Father to prove it just to satisfy Satan and the crowds who would be truly amazed at the spectacle.

***Thus, Psalm 91 and Luke 4 give us the meditative shape for week 1 of Lent.***

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