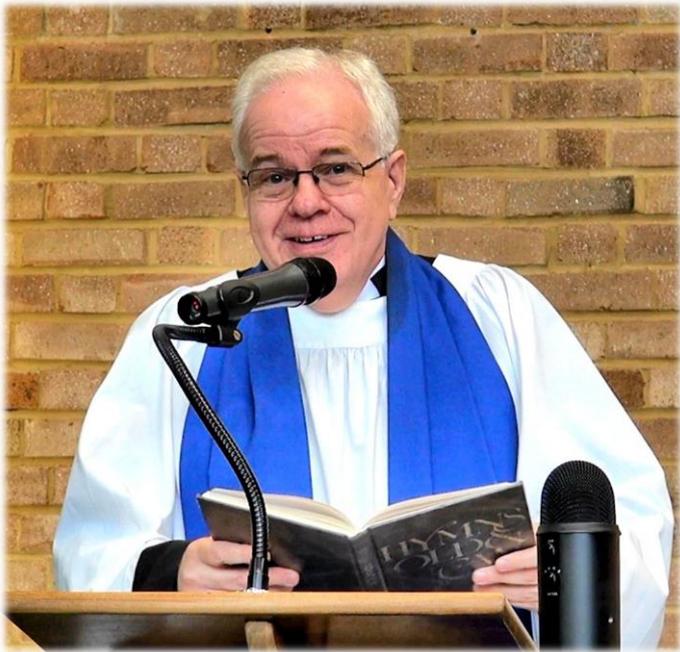


## Morning Service Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February –led by Canon Richard Osborn.



*Richard was last with us in May 2025, so we were all suffering from RODS (Richard Osborn Deficit Syndrome) and hoping for a cure, which duly came. And once again he joined our mini-choir for an anthem – meaning we were perhaps the only choir in Europe well stocked with tenors- if only for the day.*



83 years ago was the last time when Lent and the Muslim observance of Ramadan had begun on the same day, Richard told us - *and he didn't ask for a show of hands for those who had been around at the time.* Lent and Ramadan had much in common. Both were centred around values of fasting, reflection, discipline, and the strengthening of faith. Lent lasted for 40 days but didn't include Sundays – giving us a respite day each week.

It was an important time, as we mirrored the 40 days and nights that Jesus spent in the desert wilderness (He didn't get Sundays off!). It was a period of spiritual preparation for the celebration of Easter and the main elements to the observance of Lent were prayer, worship and study; almsgiving (giving to charities); and fasting.

Richard suggested we might like to devote more time to prayer and reading the Bible at home during these 40 days, reflecting on what we read, or join a Lent study group. Giving to charity was another key aspect; and if we decided to give something up for Lent, the money we saved could be directed to a specific charity. Fasting was often the most difficult discipline of Lent. We might think of giving up biscuits, chocolate, or alcohol but compared to the Muslim community, our traditional fasts could seem rather modest. Richard thought we might consider abstinence in the widest possible sense—perhaps abstaining from watching television at certain times, not using computers and mobile devices as much, or using the car less, and walking or taking public transport more.

A particularly practical and often overlooked form of abstinence, suggested by Pope Leo, was to refrain from words that offended and hurt our neighbour. He encouraged us to disarm our language, avoid harsh words and rash judgement, refrain from slander and speaking ill of those not present and unable to defend themselves. Instead, we were to strive to measure our words and cultivate kindness and respect in our families, among friends, in the media, and within Christian communities. In this way, words of hatred would give way to words of hope and peace.

The beginning of Lent, particularly the first Sunday, invited us to reflect on Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. Temptation was a natural element of the human condition. We were constantly faced with temptation—hardly a moment passed without it, in one form or another. We were regularly tempted to put ourselves first, to seek our own comfort and pleasure. Since we were all sinners, we needed Lent—a time focused on reflection, self-examination, and penitence. But we needed hope as well; the assurance that temptation's power need not overcome us.

The temptation of Jesus had followed directly after His baptism by John the Baptist in the River Jordan - a pivotal moment in his life - when a voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." This spiritual high point was quickly followed by the Spirit leading him into the desert to be tempted by the devil. This was remarkable: why would God allow His Son to endure such an ordeal? Perhaps it was necessary for Jesus, who was both God and man, to truly empathise with humanity. If He was to

bear our sin and stand with us in our frailty, He needed to experience our broken humanity in its fullness. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews had said, “Because Jesus himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”

But Jesus’ freedom in responding to temptation was also crucial. His choice to resist temptation reversed the effects of the Fall. While Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, had chosen not to resist temptation and thus brought about original sin, Jesus, in the wilderness, had chosen to resist, beginning the undoing of the curse.

The first temptation (food for a very hungry man ) was to seek immediate, personal gratification—a challenge we also faced daily. Our society increasingly struggled with patience, and the pursuit of instant fulfilment was commonplace. Jesus had rejected this temptation, quoting Deuteronomy and choosing to place God’s will above personal comfort.

The second temptation was to seek attention through sensational acts, to put ego at the centre. Again, Jesus had resisted, responding with Deuteronomy: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Finally, the devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would worship him. This was the temptation of worldly power—a lure many leaders and individuals succumbed to, seeking dominance and control (And Richard reminded us that we should be mindful, perhaps, of our own petty pursuits for power, and how we were prepared to push people aside so we could have control). Jesus, however, knew that true authority belonged to God alone, and he refused to bow.

Having resisted all three temptations, Jesus stood with us in our own struggles, knowing firsthand what it meant to be tempted, and demonstrating that it was possible to resist, provided we remained close to God and attentive to His will. As we continued through Lent, it was important to remember the cost Jesus had borne — physically and spiritually. We were encouraged to commit to reading Scripture, deepening our knowledge of God’s Word, and strengthening our own resolve against temptation. Though it was only through the Spirit’s strength and the victory of Christ’s cross that sin and death were overcome, each of us had a part to play in daily battles with temptation.

So, we should pray for strength to resist and give thanks to God for all Jesus was willing to endure, so that we might be free.

