**Readings for Sunday 21st September - Wilderness Sunday**

**COLLECT**

Sustaining God you call your friends to witness that Christ is for the healing of the Earth. Make us as loud as we are loving, finding common ground with all creatures of good will to your glory, radiant in the health of Creation through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Wild Wind, the Spirit one God, throughout all ages.

**FIRST READING**: Leviticus 16:20-22

*A reading from Leviticus*

When he has finished atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.

**SECOND READING**: Revelation 12:3-6, 13-17

*A reading from the book of Revelation*

Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born.And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.

**GOSPEL**: Matthew 3:1-12

*Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew*

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”’

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance.Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

**Post Communion Prayer**

God our creator, by your gift the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise, and the bread of life at the heart of your Church: may we who have been nourished at your table on earth be transformed by the glory of the Saviour’s cross and enjoy the delights of eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord.