Cerdded a Gweddïo gyda Christnogion y Dwyrain Canol

WYTHNOS 1: SYRIA

I'r anialwch

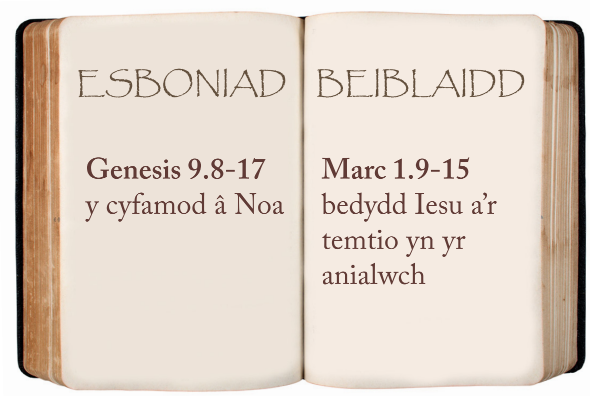
Walking and Praying with Christians of the Middle East

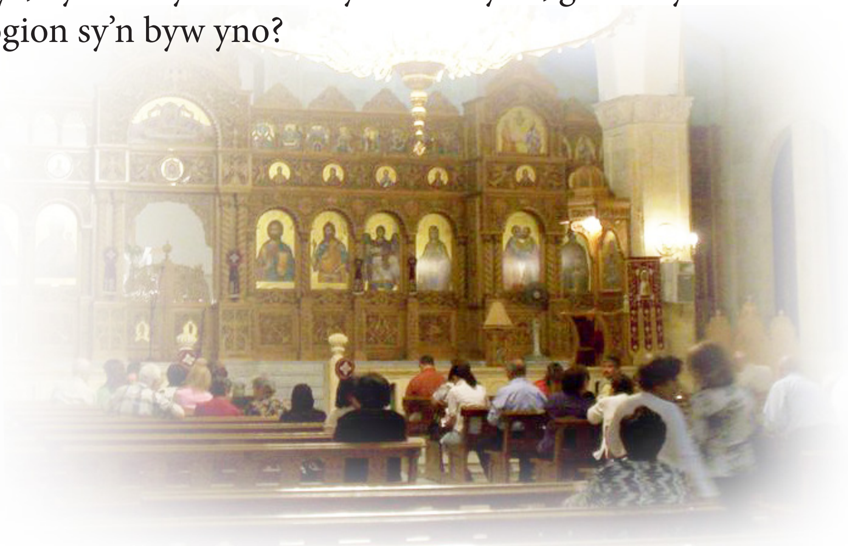
WEEK 1: SYRIA

Into the wilderness

churches together IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Yn wythnos gyntaf ein cyfres am y Garawys, byddwn yn canolbwyntio ar Syria, gwlad sy'n gyson yn y newyddion. Beth am y Cristnogion sy'n byw yno?





Mae rhywbeth yn foel iawn yn adroddiad Marc am Demtio Iesu. Mae fel cofnod byr o'r hyn a wnaeth r hywun heb fawr ddim esbonio ar y cymhellion. Ym Marc, ymddengys y Temtiad yn rhywbeth pell i ffwrdd. Stori ydyw sy'n digwydd mewn anialwch anghysbell, ac nid ar unwaith yr ydym yn uniaethu â'i threialon. Mae mor fyr nes ei bod bron yn greulon: mae'r Ysbryd yn disgyn ar Iesu pan fedyddir ef ac yna'n ei yrru'n syth i'r anialwch. Yr un yw'r ferf Groeg a ddefnyddir yma â'r un a ddefnyddir am Iesu'n bwrw allan ysbrydion aflan. Dyma, felly, foment ddiffiniol a dramatig yn Efengyl Marc!! Mae presenoldeb yr anifeiliaid gwylltion yn tanlinellu pa mor bwysig a pheryglus yw'r digwyddiad yng ngweinidogaeth Iesu.

Wrth gwrs, mae Mathew a Luc yn dweud llawer mwy wrthym am yr hyn a ddigwyddodd, ac am Satan, y temtiwr mawr. Yn yr Hen Destament, nid ymddengys Satan tan ar ôl caethgludo'r Iddewon i Fabilon. Tybed a yw Satan yn fwy real mewn amgylchiadau eithafol megis alltudiaeth neu erledigaeth?

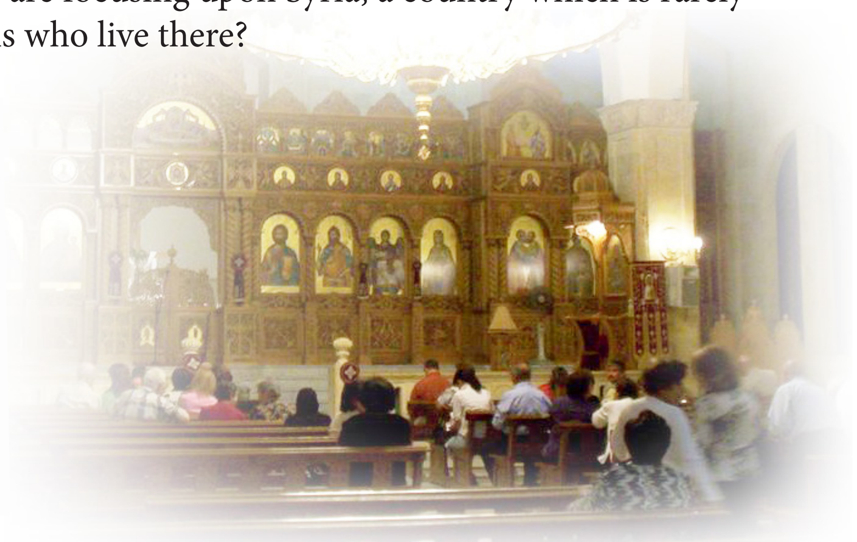
Ond yng nghanol peryglon a bygythiadau beth yw addewidion Duw? Mae'n arwyddocaol mai ein darlleniad o'r Hen Destament yw hanes y cyfamod â Noa, cyfamod a wnaed â'r ddynolryw gyfan. Mae'n datgan yn ddigamsyniol nad oes unrhyw le i angau a distryw ym mherthynas Duw â'r ddynolryw ac â'r greadigaeth. Yn y blynyddoedd diwethaf, darganfu Cristnogion, Iddewon a Mwslimiaid, wrth drafod â'i gilydd, lawer yn y Cyfamod â Noa sy'n uno'r tair crefydd: Cyfamod ydyw lle y mae Duw'n addo peidio byth â difa pob cnawd. Dyna gadarnhau ffyddlondeb Duw i bob creadur.

Gwahoddiad yw ein thema am y Garawys 2015 i gerdded a gweddïo gyda Christnogion y Dwyrain Canol. Ar hyn o bryd yr ydym ni ym Mhrydain ac Iwerddon yn gwylio mewn braw a diymadferthedd yr hyn y mae rhai o'n chwiorydd a'n brodyr o Gristnogion yn ei ddioddef. Mae llawer yn marw trwy drais; fe'u gorfodwyd i adael eu cartrefi a'u pentrefi; collasant eu bywoliaeth, a'u halltudio; rhoddwyd pwysau arnynt i droi eu cefn ar eu crefydd; gwelsant ddinistrio eglwysi a mynachlogydd hynafol; cipiwyd hyd yn oed eu plant.

Dechreuwn trwy ganolbwyntio ar Gristnogion Syria. Cawn glywed stori o'r wlad honno i'n hatgoffa o'r cyferbyniad rhwng Cyfamod Duw â Noa a gweithredoedd dynolryw: trugaredd, cariad a maddeuant yn erbyn trais, anoddefgarwch a chasineb.

Ffotograffau: www.flickr.com/photos/joshhough/2747959046/, www.flickr.com/photos/200000/2445232360/, Shutterstock.com/Stephen Rees

For this first week in our Lenten series we are focusing upon Syria, a country which is rarely out of the news. But what of the Christians who live there?



There is something very basic about Mark's account of the Temptations of Jesus. Rather like a brief account of what someone has done with little more than the most basic indication of why and what they did. The temptation of Jesus according to Mark seems a distant and far off thing, a story which happens in a distant wilderness and the trials therein are something we are not immediately drawn into. Yet for all its brevity there is almost a severity: the spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism and then drives him into the wilderness. The Greek verb used here is the same one used when Jesus drives out demons, so this is a defining and dramatic moment in Mark's Gospel! The presence of wild beasts only serves to underline the impact and the danger of this event in Jesus' ministry.

Of course we know from Matthew and Luke much more of what happened, with Satan as the great tempter. In the Old Testament, Satan as a figure does not feature until after the Jewish exile in Babylon. Is it the case that Satan becomes more real when faced with extreme circumstances such as exile or persecution?

But in the midst of danger and threat what are the promises of God? It is significant that our Old Testament passage is the Covenant with Noah, and is one that is made with the whole of humanity. It states categorically that death and destruction have no part to play in God's relationship with humanity and all creation. In recent years, dialogue between Christians, Jews and Muslims has found much in the Noah Covenant that unites three faiths: it is a Covenant wherein God vows never to destroy all flesh, an affirmation of God's faithfulness to all creatures.

Our Lenten theme for 2015 is an invitation to walk and pray with the Christians of the Middle East. We in Britain and Ireland look with a sense of horror and helplessness at what some of our Christian sisters and brothers are enduring. Many are dying violently, forced from their homes and villages, have lost their livelihoods, forced into exile, pressured to abandon their faith, seen the destruction of ancient churches and monasteries, and even had their children abducted.

We begin with a focus upon the Christians of Syria. We will hear a story from that country and are reminded of the contrast with the Covenant of God with Noah and the actions of humankind: compassion, love and forgiveness verses violence, intolerance and hatred.

Photos: www.flickr.com/photos/joshhough/2747959046/, www.flickr.com/photos/200000/2445232360/, Shutterstock.com/Stephen Rees

Yn draddodiadol, ar Sul cyntaf y Gararwys fe'n gwahoddir i'r anialwch – lle o her a themtasiwn, lle yr wynebwn bethau sy'n herio ein ffydd ac yn ein temtio, efallai, i ymateb yn ddialgar, ond lle hefyd y gall ein ffydd gael ei ddyfnhau a'i gyfoethogi mewn ffyrdd annisgwyl.

Pwy yw Cristnogion Syria?

Mae i'r ffordd i Ddamascus le amlwg ym mywyd a gweinidogaeth yr Apostol Paul. Fe all nad yw'n syndod, felly, fod Syria'n gartref i un o gymunedau Cristnogol hynaf y byd. O boblogaeth Syria o 22 miliwn, Cristnogion yw 1.8 miliwn. Fodd bynnag, erbyn haf 2013 amcangyfrifid bod 500,000 o'r rhain wedi gorfod gadael eu cartrefi, a llawer ohonynt yn ffoaduriaid yn y cyffiniau. I enwadau Dwyreiniol y perthyn yr eglwysi amlycaf yn Syria. Y fwyaf ohonynt yw Eglwys Uniongred Gwlad Groeg. Enwadau poblog eraill yw Eglwys Apostolaidd Armenia, Eglwys Uniongred Syria ac Eglwys Gatholig Gwlad Groeg. Fel yn y gwledydd o gwmpas, y mae hefyd gymunedau bychan ond bywiog o Brotestaniaid ac Efengylwyr, yn cynnwys Synod Efengylaidd Genedlaethol Syria a Lebanon.

Sut beth yw bod yn Gristion yn y cyd-destun hwn?

Mewn 48 awr, newidiodd popeth i bedwar brawd a oedd yn byw gyda'u teuluoedd mewn maestref gyfoethog yn un o ddinasoedd Syria. Dinistriwyd eu cartrefi, eu ceir a'u bwyd gan fomiau, a throwyd eu bywydau wyneb i waered. Y teimlad cyntaf oedd sioc. Yna dechreuasant ofni beth a allai ddigwydd pe baent yn aros.

Gadawodd y teuluoedd gyda'i gilydd, gan adael popeth ar ôl, yn cynnwys eu breuddwydion. Symudasant i ddiogelwch cymharol dinas newydd, a dod o hyd i un fflat i'r pedwar teulu ei rannu (16 o blant a rhieni a theidiau a neiniau). Mae'r rhent yn uchel iawn oherwydd y gwrthdaro, a rhaid ei dalu'n ddyddiol neu golli'r fflat. Ni fu croeso iddynt yn y gymdogaeth, ac y maent yn teimlo'n unig ac yn 'noeth'. Bu'n rhaid iddynt guro ar ddrysau a begera am gardod, ac y mae bod yn anghenus ac yn fregus yn anodd dros ben iddynt, yn enwedig i'r genhedlaeth hŷn. Dechreuodd rhai aelodau o'r teulu ddioddef o anhwylderau'n ymwneud â straen, gan gynnwys wlseri.

Aeth gweinidog sy'n cydlynu prosiect cymorth lleol i ymweld â'r teulu yn y fflat. Pan ofynnodd iddynt beth yr oedd arnynt ei eisiau, atebasant, 'Yn gyntaf oll, cael ein trin fel pobl, nid fel anifeiliaid'. Yr oeddynt yn Gristnogion, ac yn ystod ei ymweliad bu'r gweinidog yn gweddïo gyda'r aelodau o'r teulu a oedd yn glaf.

Dywedodd un o'r gwŷr ifainc wrtho, 'Mae fy meddwl yn gymysglyd; mae f'ymennydd wedi peidio â gweithio. Alla i ddim mwyach gynllunio at y dyfodol. Sut y galla i ailadeiladu fy mywyd, a minnau'n awr heb na chartref nac arian?' Atebodd y gweinidog fod o hyd obaith, am fod Iesu'n rhoi gobaith inni. Aeth ymlaen i drafod y B eibl gyda'r teulu, gan ddweud bod Iesu weithiau'n gosod her enfawr fel y gall pobl ddychwelyd ato ef. Ers ymweliad cyntaf y gweinidog, derbyniodd y teulu rywfaint o fwyd yn rhodd gan yr eglwys, ac mae rhai o aelodau'r teulu wedi dechrau mynychu sesiynau astudio'r Beibl.

Mae storïau fel hyn yn digwydd ledled Syria, a chaiff miloedd o deuluoedd, yn Gristnogion a Mwslimiaid fel ei gilydd, eu cynnal gan rwydweithiau eglwysig â bwyd, lloches a moddion.

Cwestiynau i'w trafod

1. Sut y byddwch yn meddwl am Gristnogion y Dwyrain Canol? A fuoch yn synied amdanynt fel hen gymuned, fel cynnyrch y mudiad cenhadol Ewropeaidd, neu a oeddech heb wybod dim amdanynt?
2. Sut yr ydych yn ymateb i'r stori o Syria?
3. Yn wythnos gyntaf y Garawys, a Christnogion yn y Dwyrain Canol ac mewn mannau eraill yn wynebu cymaint o bwysau a chaledi, a ydym yn cael ein temtio i weithredu neu adweithio? Sut y mae bywyd Iesu'n ein cynorthwyo i ymateb mewn cariad a ffyddlondeb i gyni ein cyd-Gristnogion?

Gweddi

Hollalluog Dduw,
eneinia ni â'th Ysbryd Glân,
anfon ni i anialwch y Garawys,
amddiffyn ni rhag bwystfilod gwylltion casineb a dialedd,
heria ni a thrawsnewidia ni i fod yn bobl i ti,
yn eglwys sydd yn Un
ac yn ymateb mewn cariad a chyfiawnder i bawb sy'n dioddef yn ein byd.
Gweddïwn yn enw Crist,
Amen.

This first Sunday of Lent we are traditionally invited into the wilderness – a place of challenge and temptation, a place where we are confronted with things that challenge our faith, perhaps tempting us to want to respond in vengeful ways, but it is also a place where our faith might be deepened and enriched in unexpected ways.

Who are the Christians of Syria?

The road to Damascus plays a prominent role in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. It is perhaps then unsurprising that Syria is home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Christians account for approximately 1.8 million of Syria's 22 million population although by the summer of 2013 it was already estimated that some 500,000 had been displaced from their homes and many of their number now reside across the region as refugees. The most prominent Syrian churches belong to Eastern denominations, the largest of which is the Greek Orthodox Church. Other populous denominations include the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church. In common with neighbouring countries there is also a small but active Protestant and Evangelical community, including the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and the Lebanon.

What's it like being a Christian in that context?

In the space of 48 hours, everything changed for four brothers who lived with their families in a wealthy suburb of a Syrian city. Their homes, cars, and food were destroyed by shelling, and their lives were turned upside down. First they felt shock, and then fear about what might happen next if they stayed.

The families left together, leaving behind everything, including their dreams. They moved to the relative safety of a new city, finding one apartment for all four families to share (16 children plus parents and grandparents). The rent is highly inflated as a result of the conflict, and they have to pay it on a daily basis or they will lose the apartment. They were not welcomed in the new neighbourhood, and they feel alone and 'naked'. The families have had to resort to knocking on doors and begging for hand-outs, and their new neediness and vulnerability is extremely difficult for them to adjust to, particularly for the older generation. Various family members started suffering from stress related ailments, including ulcers.

A pastor who coordinates a local relief project went to visit the families in the apartment. When he asked them what they needed, they replied, 'First, we want to be treated like human beings, not like animals.' They were Christian, and during the visit he prayed with the family members who were sick. One of the young men told him, 'My mind is confused; my brain has stopped. I can no longer think ahead. How can I rebuild my life, when I now have no home and no money?' The pastor replied that there is hope, because Jesus gives us hope. He went on to discuss the Bible with the family, and shared that sometimes Jesus gives enormous challenges so that people will return to Him. Since the time of the pastor's first visit, the family has received some food assistance through the church and a few of the family members have started to attend Bible study sessions.

Across Syria stories like this are repeated with thousands of families, Christian and Muslim alike, supported by church networks with food, shelter and medicines.

Questions for discussion

1. What are your perceptions of Middle Eastern Christianity? Up until now, have you perceived them as an ancient community, the product of the European missionary movement, or were you simply unaware of them? Why do you think Jesus chose to be baptized?
2. How do you respond to the story from Syria?
3. In this first week of Lent, with Christians experiencing so much pressure and hardship in the Middle East and elsewhere, are we tempted into actions or reactions? How does the life of Jesus help us to respond in love and faithfulness to the plight of our fellow Christians?

Prayer

Almighty God,
Anoint us with your Holy Spirit,
Drive us into the Lenten wilderness,
Protect us from the wild beasts of hatred and vengeance,
Challenge us and transform us into your people,
A church that is One,
And which responds in love and justice to all who suffer in our world,
In the name of Christ we pray,
Amen.