

6pm Evensong Sunday 11 January 2026

Joshua 3:1-8, 14-end and Luke 3:15-22 – The security of knowing that the Lord has gone before and will remain with you

You don't have to be a Crystal Palace supporter to feel that the world is going just a little bit crazy right now. The unprecedented events of 3 January in Venezuela, or the claims being made in relation to Greenland, not to mention what has been happening in Iran these last few weeks...., any one of these would be enough to make us feel unsettled, uneasy, and afraid of what might be round the corner.

And closer to home, it can be evolving family relationships, or perhaps having to react to a difficult employment situation, that can create a sense of insecurity about what the future holds. Or maybe it is having to cope with the trials of aging. Our own personal landscapes can change so much that we cannot see how we are to navigate a way through all the challenges of 2026.

For anybody for whom 2026 feels like uncharted territory, there is encouragement to be found in the story of how the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land of Canaan. For anybody who is all too aware that ***[they] have not passed this way before***, this is a story of hope and blessing found in facing up to the future.

The book of Joshua opens in chapter 1 with the Lord's command to Joshua take the Israelites from their camp in Shittim, on the plains of Moab, on the opposite side of the Jordan from Jericho, and ***to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land I have given to you, as I promised to Moses***. Joshua has instructed the people in charge of the Israelite camp to prepare provisions, for in three days they will cross the Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land. The two spies Joshua sent across the Jordan have been spotted by the Canaanites, but with help from Rahab they have escaped from Jericho, crossed back over the Jordan, and have reported to Joshua the Canaanites' fear of the Israelites. And so now Joshua tells the Israelites ***sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you***.

And just as the Lord had made a promise to Moses that bringing the Israelites out of Egypt would be the sign that ***I will be with you***, the Lord makes a promise to Joshua that ***this day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses.***

For decades, since their escape from Egypt, the Israelites have kept the ark of the covenant, the carefully crafted container for the tablets containing the law given to Moses, in the middle of the Israelites' camp. In the centre of the camp, it is a potent symbol of God's presence amongst his people. But the ark of the covenant is now to go ahead of the people, signifying how the Lord is going before them into the Promised Land.

The people are told to purify themselves, but it is the Lord who will accomplish the amazing feat of enabling the Israelites to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land. And the Lord will do this, not at the time when the Jordan is just a trickle, but when ***the Jordan overflows all its banks [at] the time of harvest.***

At harvest time the spring rains and the melting snow from Mount Hermon in the north turn the sleepy Jordan river into a raging torrent. The Israelites' hearts must have been thumping as they set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan. But then, just when ***the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from [the north] stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam*** (about 16 miles north of the bank across from Jericho) so that ***[the waters] flowing [south] towards ... the Dead Sea were wholly cut off.***

And so, while the priests carrying the ark of covenant ***stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan ... all [of] Israel [is] crossing over on dry ground ... until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.***

The Lord, symbolised by the presence of the ark in the middle of the Jordan, stays with his people until they are all across the Jordan.

No wonder this story of the crossing of the river Jordan into the Promised Land is such a powerful symbol of every Christian's passage, from the place where we are waiting for God to make himself known, to the place that God has promised that we can be, the place where God wants us to be.

It is a foretaste of the promise made by Jesus in John's gospel, that ***anyone who hears my word, and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.***

I am reminded of the end of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (sorry, spoilers!), when Christian and Hopeful come to the River, to discover it is very deep, but are told they must go through it to reach the Gate of the heavenly City.

At this point, Hopeful reminds Christian that Jesus Christ has made Christian whole. Then Christian hears the words from Isaiah 43:2:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, [and] they shall not overwhelm you.

And then Christian finds ***ground to stand upon*** in the River.

Landslips that stopped the flow of the Jordan River are not unheard of. There is a record of one occurring in 1276, and of another in 1921. But whether it was the effect of a landslip upstream, close to Adam, or was achieved by some supernatural means, we are to understand that the waters rose up, at that particular time, so that the entire nation of the Israelites crossed over the Jordan on dry ground, whilst the ark of the covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan.

Signifying to us that the Lord stayed in the middle of his people, waiting for them to find safety, ***until the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan.***

So when we wonder how we will fare, in 2026, let's call to mind those times when God has previously been with us.

Let's remember when God has done wonders within us, and has worked wonders among us.

Let's remember how God waited for all the Israelites to get across whether they were in the vanguard, or were bringing up the rear.

But even as we marvel at the sovereignty of God within his creation, and at the grace of God in keeping his promises to his people, we should remember that the waters of the River Jordan were not held up for ever.

It was Jesus who warned, in Luke's gospel, that the owner of the house does not leave the door open for ever. If you have yet to commit your life to the Lord, why not make 2026 the year that you do this?

And if you are still in any doubt as to whether, at the end of your life, you will make it to the other side of that River, why not make 2026 the year to do something about this?

2026 could be the year that you discover the difference that it makes, to know that the Lord has gone before you.

To feel secure in the certainty that the Lord has given his life for you, so that you may spend eternity with him.