

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Two verses before our Gospel lesson begins this morning, we hear this in the Gospel of Matthew:  
<sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' (Matthew 3:16-17)

The Spirit of any Baptism is so wonderful to experience, but in this Baptism of Jesus we have this beautiful image of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and the voice from heaven saying to us, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' And then, in the very next verse, we hear that the same Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And for forty days Jesus fasted, he didn't eat and he is tempted by the devil.

Things are going along "swimmingly" for Jesus...pun intended...the heavens are opened to him, the Holy Spirit comes down upon him, envelops him, and even the voice of God outwardly recognizes Jesus as His Son...what more could Jesus ask for? What could any of us ask for at this point? I guess after the Baptism, life went on for Jesus as it goes on for us all. Because we see that as soon as this Baptism seems to sink in, the same Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, or a deserted place, an uninhabitable place, or a desolate place. And it is in the challenge and testing of the devil we see the vulnerability of human life and life in relation to God come into reality.

We see also that no one, not even God's anointed Son, is free from having their identity and loyalty tested.<sup>1</sup> In other words, no one is free from what life is going to challenge any of us with. Furthermore, nowhere in all of Holy Scripture do we hear that Jesus complained or said, this just isn't fair. No where do we hear throughout these forty days in the wilderness that Jesus doubted God's presence. No where does Jesus say why or why God, would you do this to me? You call me your Son; why then do you do this to me? I have not found that anywhere in scripture.

But in so many cases, this is our reaction to this situation in life's wilderness...as is our reaction to any challenge that life throws our way. After all, we know that Jesus can raise the dead, he can calm the seas, he can restore sight to the blind, he can feed thousands with very little, why does he not just do away with the devil and his challenges? After all, Jesus is the majestic One, or the sovereign One who rejects Satan's temptations. Why then is Jesus NOT being the sort of God we thought we have...instead is this the God who is truly God for us? But today, here in the wilderness, we see God as God is, not as we would have God to be. Which brings me to the question I believe we encounter in this passage...who is Jesus and what does his identity mean for us? What does Jesus tell us about the nature of God here in this wilderness?

This was always a question a colleague of mine would ask candidates for ministry when I served on the Candidacy Committee for the Lower Susquehanna Synod...who is Jesus? Candidates would stumble with the question thinking it was some sort of trick question that needed some deep theological answer. Jesus, as we hear today from the devil and we hear at His Baptism, Jesus is

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Matthew 4:1-11 for the First Sunday of Lent, February 22, 2026 at WorkingPreacher.org, by Warren Carter, the Meinders Professor of New Testament at Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa Oklahoma.

the Son of God. Very simple...he is the Son of God. But what does that mean? This is the part that we all seem to stumble on and this is the very heart of what is being revealed to us today within this Gospel lesson concerning the temptation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

We seem to have a distorted view of God and how God works through Jesus. As I said, for us, Jesus is the majestic One. We like our Jesus to be a superhero God who can destroy and vanquish all that would challenge us in our lives, and if it doesn't happen the way we think it should, we assume then our faith is weak, or God has turned His back on us, or that God is angry with us. Nonetheless Jesus is showing us in this Gospel passage from the wilderness the ministry we are involved in through our faith. St Paul also reminded the Church in Corinth the same thing when he writes this in his second letter to them:

**4** Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ~~**16** So we do not lose heart.~~ Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

**17** For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, **18** because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. (2 Cor. 4:1, 16b-18)

When we look at the challenges being put forth by the devil, we want Jesus to destroy the devil by making him look the fool. We look at what can be seen by looking at what we can understand. We then react accordingly. But what does Jesus really accomplish by doing this?

Let's face it, the devil presents Jesus with three proposed actions that have highly desirable outcomes. After a few days without food, if I had the power to change anything into food I would. But looking at the unseen, or perhaps the, "not so obvious", when Jesus feeds the crowds with very little in chapters 14 and 15 of this very Gospel, it's not made clear if Jesus himself ate. Then we hear that the devil places him above the temple in the holy city and then offers Jesus the power over all the empires of the world. And Jesus turns it all down...he rejects the devil's offers for sustenance, for personal benefit, and divine power. He does so because if Jesus acts on the devil's bidding, he becomes an instrument of the devil. He ceases then to be the instrument of God or even the Son of God. He would then betray his identity.<sup>2</sup>

If Jesus gives into the devil...the glory of God will not be seen, nor will we see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven. (Matt. 24:27-31; 26:64) In the temptation the devil appeals to what is seen, personal power, desire, and even hunger. What Jesus reveals is the unseen eternal things through his fidelity to God and to himself as God's Word, and to his glory to overcome.

When we look at glory in terms of this passage, what do we see? We tend to look for the temporary...we look for the splendor of power, personal benefit, wealth, or we look for the fullness of the being of God to vanquish the devil with divine power and might. But that is exactly what the devil wants and what the devil gives. But here in this challenge, the unseen, eternal thing is God's glory, glory that is the conventional love of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ and remains unbroken through His fidelity and obedience to God.

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<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Matthew 4:1-11 for the First Sunday of Lent, February 22, 2026 at WorkingPreacher.org, by Warren Carter, the Meinders Professor of New Testament at Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa Oklahoma.

This temptation in the wilderness is a triumph for each of us as a child of God. It is a triumph for us because Jesus overcomes temptation with his human will. He could have vanquished the devil with his divine might, and we all probably would have taken a great deal of delight in seeing this, but this again is a temporary thing that is seen. The unseen eternal thing is that Jesus faced the trial in a human way, in full solidarity with humanity, he never ceased to be the Son of God, and yet he won the battle as a man, and won the battle for each and every one of us, so that we too remain true to our identity, an identity that sees us as broken children of God who live in the grace and glory of God through the fidelity and glory of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

This past Wednesday our Lenten journey began with the recognition of our own mortality and today we are reminded that on our journey to the grave we are tempted, in the heights of the best of our situations and in the wilderness of our struggles and challenges...we are and will always be tempted. In it...we fall, we hide, and we bargain for more to make ourselves appear better than it all. Nonetheless, present in it all is God's WORD incarnate, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, God's WORD incarnate is present among us, engaging our humility, engaging our thoughts and imaginations but most of all, by this Word incarnate our faith is empowered, nurtured, and enriched beyond all human values and understandings. May we today like Jeremiah who proclaimed:

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16)

May we too find God's WORD that is before us in this Holy Meal and eat with joy and delight knowing that we are God's own who will face the challenges of this life with all our faith and all our humanity. It is the Word of this Holy Meal that sustains us in the wilderness of our temptations. It is the wilderness of our lives that we learn that we cannot simply say, away with you Satan. However, we have been blessed with a gift of faith that opens our hearts and our minds to discern and reflect upon God's WORD incarnated Jesus Christ. Through God's WORD we learn that as human's we are vulnerable to the temptations of this world, but by that same WORD we are fed something much richer, something much more satisfying, something much more pleasant, and something certainly much more powerful...we are fed God's WORD incarnate and in that Holy Meal we are given grace and new life in God's glorious kingdom. May this be our joy and our delight...

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

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<sup>3</sup> Some of this paragraph is adapted from, Curits Mitch and Edward Sri's commentary on, *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2010. Chapter, "The Messiah Tested and Reveled, Matthew 4:1-25, pages, 74-77.