

The Temptation of Jesus
First Sunday in Lent
Matthew 4:1-11
February 9, 2008 (Saturday)

Just after Jesus was baptized,

while those who heard the voice from heaven were probably still pondering what God meant when He said: “This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”

the Holy Spirit, in very un-dovelike fashion, drove Jesus out into the wilderness.

This wilderness, *hē erēmos*, was a dry place of sharp rocks, sparse vegetation, and wild animals. Sounds like a place we would know.

Jesus didn’t come to the desert for any of the reasons most of us did.

Most of us moved to the edge of the Mohave because we thought it would be easier here...easier for our health, or to find a job, or to make a living, or to see our families. Not so with Jesus.

Jesus’ family and His future, His vision and His vocation, all lay both behind and ahead of him, outside this hostile desert land.

Jesus went to the desert to find temptation, and to overcome it, to emerge tested and true, to walk with Satan at His side, and to hear no other voice than that of the Father of Lies for more than a month and yet remain the faithful Son of the Heavenly Father and have Him still be well pleased with Him.

Moses had gone to Sinai and for forty days sat at the feet of God, who spoke only of holiness.

Jesus goes to the wilderness and for forty days he listens as the original *Spinmeister* profanes, defiles and distorts every truth, every relationship, every motive and promise of the Father.

While Moses was gone to Sinai those forty days, Israel had not been able to take it, but had descended into idolatry and envy, lies and orgiastic reveling. If they had only killed someone, they could have made a clean sweep of the commandments.

The LORD said to Moses, “Stand aside. I will destroy them all.”

Jesus is the embodiment of the New Israel, Who overcomes the harshest challenges of the world and His flesh and the cleverest temptations of Satan, and He glorifies God with every step.

And the LORD said to the angels, “Go down, and minister to Him.”

The great temptation before us today is that we might think, “I’m not going to be like Israel.

I will be like Moses, sitting at the feet of God, listening only to holy words.

I will be like Jesus, making all the right choices and using just the right Bible passages to leave the devil defeated and confounded.”

If St. Peter is right and the devil is like a hungry lion seeking whom he may devour, seeing you act like that must get the diabolic digestive juices flowing. That’s not thunder you hear; that’s Satan’s stomach rumbling. He can tell when it’s supper time.

If Martin Luther is right, and remember, Brother Martin knew more than a little about pointless piety and an errant ego, on earth there is no equal in battle to the Old Evil Foe, whose guile is deep and whose might is great.

There’s just no winning against the devil.

You can’t outthink him,
you can’t outtalk him,
you can’t overpower him,
and you can’t outrun him.

And by the way, he knows more Scripture than you do.

Hopeless. Hopeless.

With might of ours could naught be done; soon were our loss effected.

But now a champion comes to fight, whom God Himself elected. He wins the field against the foe, and He holds the field forever.

He defeated Satan, not only here in the wilderness, but consistently throughout His ministry and ultimately at the cross.

So Satan is still terrible, but not triumphant. And you will never have to face him alone. The One who has defeated Satan is with you, at your side, leading you in holiness. No matter how or where or when the devil attacks us, Jesus is with us always, victorious to the end of the age.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*Gregory Mech, pastor
First Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Las Vegas, NV*