

Introductory

This reading has parallels in Matthew and Luke. It is actually made up of three short readings that relate three separate incidents: the Baptism of Jesus, His temptation in the Wilderness, and the beginning of His going into Galilee and preaching. In Matthew and Luke, the three incidents are recorded in the same order, with two notable differences.

Firstly, the accounts given by Matthew and by Luke are longer than Mark's, which is a not uncommon occurrence in the synoptics, and both include several specific temptations made. Secondly, both Matthew and Luke include a genealogy, Lukes after the Baptism and before the Temptation. Mark doesn't include any genealogy anywhere in his Gospel.

Matthew's account (4:1-11) is the appointed reading for Invocavit, sometimes called Quadragesima, the First Sunday in Lent in the TLH one-year lectionary. The Matthew, Mark, and Luke accounts of the Temptation are appointed to be read respectively on The First Sunday in Lent for years A, B, and C respectively in both the LW and the LSB.

Textual Notes

9. Mark has begun his account of the life of Jesus with an account of John the Baptizer, preceded by a quote from Isaiah, one of the few times Mark references the OT. He then proceeds to talk about this thing that “Καὶ ἐγένετο – it came to pass,” a phrase included in the KJV and other older translations, but consistently missing in the newer translations.

A quick glance at the apparatus in Nestle-Aland reveals that the phrase is included in what textual critics would call some of the “better” texts, and it is left out of some of the “weaker” texts. NA leaves the phrase in. So should we, because words mean something, and the words are, “ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις – it came to pass in those days.”

The verb is not “εἰμί,” the verb of *being*, but it is an aorist form of “γίνομαι,” the verb of *becoming*. The lexicon at www.biblos.com says that the word speaks of a thing or person who “has properly, to *emerge, become, transitioning* from one point (realm, condition) to another.” Here, Jesus is indeed about to undergo a very drastic transition in His life.

Up to this point He has lived His life in relative obscurity, a guy named Jesus dwelling in the small backwater town of Nazareth, known to family and other inhabitants there, but probably almost completely unknown outside of there. That is all about to change, and the change comes at His Baptism, where He is identified by the Father to be His Son.

That event marks the beginning of what is generally known as The Public Ministry of Jesus, which lasted for three years. That phrase “in those days - ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις”

is not redundant to coming to pass, but it speaks to the matter of *timing* rather than *becoming*. The time has come for Jesus to do what Jesus has come to earth to do.

Paul says (Gal 4:4) that Jesus came “in the fullness of time,” meaning that God did not just wake up one morning and decide to come into the world, but that the timing of His coming was correct. Part of that timing is conditions in the world – Pax Romana, Koine Greek, Roman roads, Diaspora – all were conducive to the spread of a new religion.

10. Mark gives us the basics of the Baptism; that Jesus was from Nazareth, that John was the one who baptized Him, and that it took place in the Jordan River. He then talks about Jesus “ἐνθὺς ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος – going up out of the water,” an aorist verb. In the Jordan River, a person could be – but not necessarily was – baptized by immersion,

The phrase “ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος – going up out of the water” is a favorite alleged proof text for the Anabaptists, who add to God’s Law by requiring people to be baptized only by immersion, and they reject all other modes of washing. But if you turn to Acts 8:39, it is clear that the phrase “going up out of the water” is a figure of speech; an idiom.

An idiom is a figure of speech understood by one culture or group, but not by necessarily understood by other cultures or groups. That term “going up out of the water” was understood by people in first century Palestine as referring to the applying of water to a person in a religious act, whether or not he actually went completely under the water.

In Acts 8:39, Phillip has just finished baptizing the Ethiopian Eunuch. It says that they “came up out of the water.” That phrase used in Acts is quite nearly word-for-word the exact same phrase used here by Mark (1:10.) The only difference, and it is a minor difference, is that the verb in Acts is in the aorist form, not a participle, like it is here.

We further note that the baptism described in Acts took place on a “ἔρημος – country” road in the Gaza Strip, a place where there is no water deep enough to immerse a human being. That lack of water is attested to by people who have been there, and by Google maps. Therefore, “going up out of the water” can only and must be seen as an idiom.

He then says that “εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανούς – he saw the heavens tearing open,” another present participle. And now, “Πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν – the Spirit of God was descending upon Him,” yet another present participle. While He was in the act of coming out of the water, He saw heaven open, and the spirit of God descend.

KJV says simply that the heavens “opened” here. Many of the newer translations pick up on the nuance of it being more than that, having the heavens “tearing open” or “ripping apart.” The base meaning of the verb “σχίζω” is “to split or cleave,” and the word often, but not always, has connotations of an unusual or even cataclysmic event or occurrence.

The curtain of the temple, stones, garments and nets, and people are said to be “split.” Perhaps most notably, the heavens are said to “tear open” in Acts 10:11 when the sheet full of unclean items is presented to Peter. The Baptism of Jesus is a momentous, cataclysmic event, and would have been noted as such by those who were present for it.

Here, The Father is showing any who are watching that He is God, and with His words telling them that Jesus is His Son. It has never happened before, and it will never happen again, that the Son of God takes on human flesh. It is both a momentous and a cataclysmic event, one that changes everything forever and triggers the apocalypse.

The “Spirit of God” in form of a dove said to be descending from heaven has to be the Third Person of the Trinity. The Spirit took the form of a dove and landed on Jesus. The “on” is “εἰς” followed by an accusative noun, movement into. The Holy Spirit is entering into Jesus in much the same way that the Holy Spirit enters anybody else at Baptism.

11. Finally, “καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν – a voice came out of the heavens,” an aorist indicative middle verb. The voice of the Father speaks *of* the Son, and He speaks *to* the Son, telling Him that “You” are “Υἱός μου – My Son,” that He is “ἀγαπητός – beloved,” and that The Father is “pleased” with The Son. He doesn’t say that about us.

Christian Baptism is the connecting point between the Christian and the Christ. Jesus took the place of sinners at His Baptism, and we take the place of The Saint at our own. In Baptism we see that we are beloved of Him, that we are His child, and that with us He is well-pleased, because our sins have been washed away on account of His work.

If you want to roll out Luther’s Flood Prayer, it says that sort of stuff pretty eloquently.

12. The Holy Spirit having entered into Him, the Spirit “ἐκβάλλει εἰς τὴν ἔρημον – drove Him out into the wilderness,” where we are further told that He was there for forty days. During those forty days He was tempted by Satan. Matthew and Luke, who are clearly speaking of this same incident, give us a lot more detail than Mark, which is not unusual.

But since the Mark text is the one from which we are exegeting the meaning and on which we will be preaching, I will be sticking close to Mark’s account and avoiding importing too much from the others. I don’t think there’s any hard and fast rule as to when to import from other synoptics and when to not, but the older I get, the less I do.

The verb used to describe what the Spirit did to Jesus, the one translated by KJV as “driveth,” as in “the Spirit driveth Him...” is ἐκβάλλω. The word occurs eighty-one times in the NT, and it is used to describe the driving out of such things as demons, the beam from the eye of the hypocrite, people cast into hell, workers sent out into the fields,

But mostly to the casting out of demons. The word seems often to have a certain “sink or swim” quality to it, with just a pinch of violence lurking just below the surface. There is

a certain irony in the idea that Jesus, who will soon be driving out demons, is being driven by the Spirit to the “wilderness,” the abode of the demons, to be tempted by Satan,

Does the reference to irony get your attention and maybe pique your interest? Does talk of irony make you think? That’s what figures of speech do, and that’s why we should use figures of speech when talking to people. Irony creates pathos (emotion) in the hearer, but even more, irony causes the hearer to think (logos), and both of those are good things.

God created the human brain, and He gave one to each of us, and we ought not be afraid to use them. Not only can it be said that humans think, but it has to be recognized that we *have to* think, we *can’t not* think, and that we think all the time, non-stop. During Divine Service on Sunday morning, people will be thinking. We want them to think about God.

People are going to be thinking the whole time they are in church, and if the man in the pulpit makes the person in the pew think about God, then he will not be compelled to think about all those other things. Make no mistake about it; every person is thinking about *something* during every sermon, and we want them to be thinking about God, right?

We use figures of speech and stories, like God uses figures and stories, to make His very interesting Word more interesting to the hearer, thereby making it more likely that they will listen to that very interesting Word and think about it, and not the head of the person in front of them, or the peeling paint on the ceiling, or the bulletin, or where’s dinner?

We are all more likely to listen if the speaker is more interesting. Several years ago, I listened (via CD) to *King of Hearts* by G. Wayne Miller. It was such a good listen that I did it again a couple of years later. The title of the book refers to Dr. C Walton Lillehei, the man who post-war pioneered open-heart surgery at the University of Minnesota.

The author starts off by relating how he came to be interested in the very interesting subject of open-heart surgery, and how he went to the library to get a book to learn more about it, and when he went to the library, he found there only books written by doctors in doctor language, a dialect that he found to be ponderous to read, and so he didn’t.

Those authors had taken interesting subject matter and, by writing about it in the way that they wrote about it, made it seem boring. Miller’s book is anything but boring. He, like Aristotle, God, and other modern good writers, writes in a way that makes the interesting subject matter come alive. He tells the story, and he uses figures to tell the story.

Early on, the reader gets to know Walt Lillehei the person, and we begin to see what made that genius tick. We see the other side of genius, the excesses, his philandering, the costly mistakes. We meet and get to know Patty Anderson, one of his first patients, and when she dies, we feel like we have lost a friend, not a nameless, faceless, patient.

Miller uses examples. For example, he tells us that the Doctor is a brilliant man, but that his brilliance went beyond the typical brilliance, and then the author gives us this example; two people could be standing around talking about whether the glass was half-empty or half-full, and Walt's thinking would be far beyond theirs, far outside the box.

He would, Miller says, be questioning whether the glass was the best receptacle for the water, and he would have thought of several better places to keep your water. Not all quotes are the same. Longer quotes tend to be poorer quotes, and boring quotes are boring. Miller uses good and memorable quotes and avoids bad and forgettable quotes.

When talking about how difficult things are at first for open-heart surgery, and it applies to any pioneer, the author quotes the Doctor as saying, "You don't venture into the wilderness expecting to find a paved road." That's a good and interesting quote, and I used it in a sermon six and three years ago on this text, as Jesus goes into the wilderness.

These things are some of the characteristics of the writing style known as *New Journalism*, which includes things like character development and dialogue, along with figures of speech. The Bible – particularly the Gospels – look a lot like that, and as usual, Wik is a good starting – but not necessarily ending – point to learn more about it.

Sometimes pastors use pastor talk to talk to people about the very interesting subject of God. They throw undefined theological terms and concepts at them like the doctor or the mechanic who knows what he's talking about, but he is somehow unable to communicate that knowledge to us. You don't like it, and they don't like it on Sunday morning.

One of the common criticisms of preaching is that it's boring, the opposite of interesting. If we take as a given that God and talk about God is interesting – and I know a lot of pastors who find theology very interesting – then if preaching is boring, where lies the problem? And I know a lot of laymen who find theology to be very interesting.

13. Driven by the Spirit, Jesus went out “καὶ ἦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας – and He was in the wilderness forty days.” I have lately taken to referring to what most of the translations render “wilderness” as “out in the country.” There is a lot of wilderness in western Montana, but not in eastern Iowa, but we do know about “out in the country.”

4 is the number of Creation (out in the country), and 10 is the number of completion or infinity, and the present participle “πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ - He was being tempted by Satan” means that it went on for all of those 40 days, and it was personal. Matthew and Luke give us some specifics of specific temptations. Mark does not.

The connection of this incident, which lasted forty days, to the wilderness wanderings under Moses, which lasted forty years, has been noted by many. In both cases, God's people were in the wilderness because of sin and unbelief. In both cases they were subjected to temptation to sin. Israel often succumbed to it. Jesus did not, no even once.

And if you talk about the here and now, talking about how we are likewise in the wilderness, having escaped through the Red Sea of Baptism, now wandering in the place of sin, temptation, and danger, awaiting our destination; the Promised Land of heaven, those things will be of interest to them and will probably create pathos in them.

The “wild beasts” are exclusive to Mark, who writes “καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ - and He was with the wild beasts, and angels ministered to Him.” This is the only time mentions “wild beasts,” but it occurs forty-five other times in the NT, most of them in the Revelation of John, mostly in reference to satanic workings.

Faux Bible scholars think the “wild beasts” were added later on because of the Christians who were being torn apart by them in the Colosseum and other arenas. Nestle-Aland has no variants, so there is no reason to think that the word is a later addition. In the Bible, “θηρίων – wild animals” are almost never a good thing, and almost always a bad thing,

Indeed, Mark uses the word to assure the Roman Christians, who bore the brunt of the Roman revulsion to Christianity, that Jesus had also, like them, been among such beasts and had overcome them. They should therefore take heart, knowing that through their Leader, they too would overcome, which is pretty much the message of Revelation.

There is a question as to whether or not Mark is talking about actual “beasts” or using the word as a metaphor for Rome, like John does in Revelation. Claudius reigned over the Roman Empire from 41 A.D., and he was succeeded by Nero in 54, and the Gospel of Mark was written during that time. Nero’s persecution of Christians is well-known.

During Nero’s rule Christians were literally “with the beasts,” being torn to pieces for the entertainment of the masses. That practice may or may not have started with Claudius, his predecessor. Roman historian Suetonius says that Claudius expelled the Christians – who seem to have been mostly Jewish – from Rome somewhere between 41 and 53.

In his biography *The Life of Claudius*, chapter 25, he writes, "Since the Jews were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of CHRESTUS, he expelled them from the city..." (www.csun.edu). While speaking of the expulsion of Christians, we might ask why he does not speak of them being thrown to the beasts, but then why would he?

The gladiatorial games had been going on for a long time, and humans being killed for sport was common, and no record of the nameless victims was ever kept. Expulsion was unusual and noteworthy, and we note the expulsion here as evidence that Claudius was no friend of Christians. The man who would expel would certainly feed you to the beasts.

While Jesus was in the wilderness, with the beasts, being tempted by Satan, Mark tells us that angels served Him. We have several times dealt with the question of the exact form taken by the “ἄγγελοι - messengers” and have noted that these may or may not be actual men, and that they may or may not have actual wings, and Billy Graham’s book is good.

The verb “διακονέω” means that they were attending to his personal physical needs, much as your valet or lady in waiting tends to you. The imperfect tense of the verb is the way that the Greek language puts the focus on connection between the actor and the action in *past*, not in present time. They did that there, then they stopped doing that.

14. And then “μετὰ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάνην – after the arrest of John the Baptizer,” Jesus went to Galilee. The word used to describe the arrest of John is “παραδοθῆναι,” a word that occurs one hundred twenty times in the NT, sometimes with positive connotations, like when you “hand over” traditions or the Scriptures to those who follow.

Other times the word carries negative connotations, like when you betray somebody like Judas did or when you are delivered to the jailer. John has been delivered to the jailer, and the purpose of Jesus’ going to Galilee is almost certainly to avoid the same fate, and that doesn’t make Jesus a chicken. It means that He was a human, and so was Joseph.

To leave Herod’s jurisdiction for a more familiar location is simply to do what Joseph had done when he was instructed by the angel to go to Egypt, and he took his family and went to Egypt. Jesus knows where He is going, but He knows that He will go there only when the time is right, and several other times in the NT we see Him avoiding danger.

When He gets to Galilee, Jesus is said to be “κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Θεοῦ – preaching the gospel of God.” The word for preaching is “κηρύσσων,” a participle form of the common verb for the public proclamation of the Word, and the content of His preaching is “εὐαγγέλιον,” literally “the good message” or we might call it “good news.”

The word is commonly translated “gospel,” a term that has become part of the Christian vocabulary. The term “gospel” has become a Christian idiom, and while most Christians are familiar with the term and have some sort of an understanding of it, and most non-Christians do not, different brands of Christians define the term in different ways.

In fact, many Christians define the term completely opposite from how Lutherans define it, and in many cases they turn the Gospel into Law. If you listen much to much “gospel” music, you quickly notice that the message tends to be generally quite Law oriented, it is often devoid of any “good news,” but almost certainly it creates pathos in the hearer.

Not all pathos is the same. Some is bad. Most Americans who don’t go to church or who listen to that kind of music on PBS are more likely to hear the word used to refer to something that is an established principle, particularly in politics, where Republicans may speak of the “Reagan Gospel,” and Democrats may speak of “the gospel of Obama.”

Google “Reagan gospel” and find a story about how “Reagan preached tax-cut gospel,” Do the same with Obama and you get “Obama’s New Gospel.” All of which is to say that we need to define the term gospel frequently, because our hearers need to understand what the pastor means – and what he does not mean – when he uses the word “gospel.”

The reason that I call this endeavor “Focus on the Gospel” is because I strive to focus on that, the Good News of salvation in Christ, like Jesus did, and to help others to better do that, which we can do by following the lead of Jesus. That’s a very Lutheran thing to do, and it baffles me to no end why so much Lutheran preaching is so heavy into the Law.

Take the parables of Jesus. It goes without saying that parables are stories, and that Jesus uses stories to teach. What maybe needs to be said is that the stories Jesus tells, the ones that we call parables, are almost all Gospel, with the notable exception of the parables of judgment against the religious leaders, and they very well understand those parables.

But most parables are Gospel, not Law. The problem, I think, and the reason why a lot of Lutheran preachers turn gospel-proclaiming parables into the Law, is because they read protestant commentaries and teachers, who when commenting on the parables of Jesus turn the Gospel into the Law because that’s what they do because that’s who they are.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is probably the most graphic example of turning Gospel into Law in a parable of Jesus. In that parable, the Scribe begins with a Law oriented question, and Jesus masterfully turns the conversation to the Gospel, the Good Samaritan, Who is Jesus. The Protestants make it about helping a stranger change a flat.

A parable the teller says is about a generous householder becomes a story telling us we should be happy with what we have and stop whining. The story about Jesus considering us His greatest treasure is turned into a lecture on stewardship. You can get Thielicke’s *The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus* on Amazon, but it’s a bit pricey.

Every commentator knows that the Good Samaritan is Jesus, or at least they did until the twentieth century. It’s why I prefer the older commentaries on biblhub to the new. Too many Lutheran preachers may be reading too many of those other commentaries. Voelz and Just and the like are pricy, but you get a lot of bang for your buck, and this is free.

15. The content of the preaching of Jesus is specifically “καὶ λέγων ὅτι Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ” – Jesus was saying ‘the time has been fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven draws near.’ The word translated “saying” is λέγων, a present active participle, indicating connection of the act to the person, and continuous action.

The verb “πεπλήρωται - fulfilled” is in the perfect tense, indicating past action with results that continue into the future. If there was ever a time when past actions continue into the future, it was the life of Jesus, whose work lasts for eternity. The word for time is “καιρός,” a word that bespeaks the idea of timing rather than time, as noted previously.

The word “χρόνος” not used here, is the word for time; the time of day. Some note that the derivation of “καιρός” is from the word “head,” and see here things “coming to a head,” and most certainly they are. The battle between God and Satan, waged since The Rebellion, fought throughout the OT – the God of Sabaoth has come to earth to do battle.

He says “ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ – the Kingdom of God has come near.” It has come extremely near. In His Person, He brings the Kingdom, but more than that He now proclaims the Kingdom, and even more than that He *is* the Kingdom of Heaven. Almost always, when Jesus says the Kingdom is “among” you, He’s talking about Himself.

The content of the preaching of Jesus is lastly expressed by two commands: “μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ – repent and believe in the Gospel.” I suppose commands like those two are what the Lutheran mean when they talk about a “Gospel Imperative,” but that sounds like confusing Law and Gospel, which is to the Lutheran anathema.

Sometimes imperative means invitation, like here.

Law/Gospel

Failure/Success – When we are tempted, we sometimes resist temptation, like Jesus did. More often than not, we give in to temptation, like Eve and Adam did. Because of our failure to resist, and our eagerness to sin, we are going to Hell. When Jesus was tempted, He did not give in. He did not give in once, in thought, word, or deed. He did everything that He was supposed to do, and He did it with completeness and a perfection that could only have been achieved by God Himself. Because of what Jesus did, and our believing it, we are going to heaven.

Self/God – The admonition to “repent” is an invitation to stop trusting in self for our salvation, and to start trusting in God for our salvation. The natural man, having no other option, must trust self. The Christian knows better.

Unbelief/Belief – The admonition to “believe” is an invitation to stop believing the wrong things about self and God and to start believing the right things about self and God. It further invites the hearer to receive the saving faith that God give through Word and Sacrament.

No Word/Yes Word – The Catechumens were asking last week about idols. They were able to recite the main American idols; money, athletes, etc, but not popularity, the idol elephant in the middle of the Junior High room. And then they stopped. They were out of idol candidates. I think that we may have somewhat let our youth down.

We can talk about those things as possible idols, but why don’t they know that religions like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, the LDS et al worship idols? The good news is that, when the Catechumens worship God, they worship the right God, not an idol. The reason why they know about this God, and know correct things about Him, is because God has

worked through Word and Sacrament to birth them, and now to feed them. Not having Word and Sacrament, billions of people around the world have only idols to satisfy the natural man's craving for the divine.

I think that maybe if we engender in our young people an appreciation for Word and Sacrament, then they will be more likely to come to the place where Word and Sacrament are available each and every Sunday.

Sermon Titles

Winners and Losers

Voice from the Sky

Baptism, Temptation, and Preaching

Hymns

Lift High the Cross – LSB 837

All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall – LSB 562

What a Friend We Have in Jesus – LSB 770

Christ the Life of All the Living – LSB 420

Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me – LSB 715

A Mighty Fortress – LSB 656, 657

Jesus, Refuge of the Weary – LSB 423

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, IA

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Mark).
Intervarsity Press, 2002

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BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark..* The Westminster Press, 1975

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MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

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Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html