

Introductory

This text has parallels in Matthew (4: 1-11) and Mark (1: 12,13). Like many synoptic accounts, each account of this incident is a bit different, and Mark's is greatly shortened. The Matthew account is appointed to be read on Lent 1 in the TLH three-year lectionary. In both LW and LSB, those three accounts are appointed for years A, B, and C on Lent 1.

Spiritual warfare is being engaged in here. That warfare has been going on since Eve and Adam. This is a good time to talk about the topic of Satan and temptation. People experience temptation every day, and they need to know and be reminded what to do with it and how to deal with it. Peter speaks of Satan using the simile of "a roaring lion."

The context of this account is important. At His Baptism, the beginning of the "public" ministry of Jesus (you'll need to explain what you mean by that), conclusively identified by the Father as the Son of God, "in whom I am well pleased." From that point on Jesus has a target painted on His back, and Satan will try to destroy Him.

Textual Notes

1. Luke tells us that Jesus was "πλήρης Πνεύματος Ἁγίου – filled with the Holy Spirit." It's a term used by Luke, and only by Luke, and nine times he says that a person(s) will be so filled. Whenever somebody is so filled, we see that they then go on to proclaim the Word of God. It begins with Elizabeth, continues with Zachariah, and it finds its fullest expression on the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus is going where He is going and when He gets there, He will proclaim the Word. You may want to note for your hearers that it's difficult to use the Word to fight against the temptations of Satan if you don't know that Word. You come to church on Sunday morning and get filled with the Word through Word and Sacrament, so that you can fight against Satan the rest of the week.

If you think about how the Holy Spirit comes to a person, then we see how one comes to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." One comes to be so filled by being exposed to the Word of God, including the spoken and written Word, and the Sacraments, which had not yet been invented. The Word is poured in through the ear, from the mouth of another, and one then gets filled up with the Word.

Having been so filled, now that full person is able to discharge that Word through the mouth into somebody else's ear. In that entire process, the brain does what it does, processing information, and the Spirit inside of the Christian does what it does, and we deliberately put ourselves into a position to have the Word of God filling us up, we process that Word, and then we proclaim it.

I never liked that idea that the Christian is like a car that needs to have its gas tank filled up in order to run, but there's something to it. Being filled with the Spirit – exposing oneself to the Word – is not a one time, but it is a habitual thing. It's like breathing, or eating, and if you stop doing things like that, you quickly notice and just as quickly move to start doing that thing again.

It's Tuesday morning, and on Tuesday morning I take a look at the readings for Sunday, then open up the Sermon and Notes file from three years ago. Then I go to biblehub.com and allow God to fill me with the Holy Spirit for about four hours. While being filled, I write these notes, and when an idea for the sermon comes up, I write it down at the top of this week's sermon document.

On Thursday morning, I review those notes, go to the sermon document, and write a sermon that will be proclaimed on Sunday morning. In processing that Word, what things does the brain take into consideration? Mostly your audience, who will be mostly the same as last week and three years ago. Put yourself in their shoes; think about what they're hearing when you're preaching.

Having been so filled with the Spirit, by that same person ἤγετο ἐν τῷ Πνεύματι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ - being led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” He leaves the area around the Jordan River, where He had just been baptized, and He does not wander willy-nilly from one place to another. He is led into the wilderness because that's the place where He is going to be tempted by Satan, and He is.

The idea that you should get away from temptation by removing self from the company of people is not a new one. The Greek word “μοναχός – alone,” is the root of the words used to describe the “monastic” movement and “monk.” Men and sometimes women would go off alone, to get away from society, and the “stylites” famously lived at the tops of poles, away from man, nearer to God.

It doesn't work that way. Jerome noted of the hermits that “their chief occupation was passing judgment upon the world from the seclusion of their retreats.” I know people like that. He concludes that “it is better to dwell among wild beasts than with such Christians.” I agree with that. Jerome should know about those things. For a time, he himself lived the hermit lifestyle.

You see how the Spirit has led Him, not into a city or public arena, but into a wilderness. In this desolate place, the Spirit extended the devil an occasion to test him, not only for hunger, but also for loneliness, for it is there most especially that the devil assails us, when he sees us left alone and by ourselves. In the same way did he also confront Eve in the beginning, having caught her alone and apart from her husband. Chrysostom.

Because isolation is the richest environment for Satan to launch a successful temptation, the Holy Spirit directs Jesus to a place where He will be alone in His coming fight against temptation. In Acts, when Luke talks about The Holy Spirit (the Church) directing people to go here and there, it means that the Church is directing the person where to go and in at least one case where not to go.

This event takes place in the “wilderness” – we would call this “out in the country” – and lasts forty days, and it parallels the wilderness wanderings of Israel, which lasted forty years. You can bring in the Red Sea crossing and talk about Baptism, and the Passover and talk about the Sacrament, and talk about the struggle here until we reach the Promised Land of heaven.

2. For forty days, He was “πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου – being tempted by the Devil.” The present participle indicates an ongoing and continual temptation. During those days, Luke uses two negatives to say, “οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲν – not he ate nothing.” Unlike in America, in Greek grammar, two negatives don’t negate one another, but emphasize the total lack of eating by Jesus.

Due to those forty days without food, “καὶ συντελεσθεῖσιν αὐτῶν ἐπείνασεν – when they were completed, He was hungry.” That figure of speech is called understatement, and it’s the opposite of embellishment, and it’s similar to litotes, except that in that figure of speech (litotes) a negator is used to understate a thing. We see no negator here, but only understatement; “He was hungry.”

Why use a figure? Why not just say it? What is the effect on the hearer of the speaker saying, “He was hungry?” Probably to say to himself something like “ya, I’ll bet” and to imagine what kind of hunger pangs would have been racking his body after forty days without food. I get that after a while the pangs diminish, but – well, read *Unbroken* or *Endurance* before you go too far with that.

Go ahead and mention the obvious; Satan attacks at the most vulnerable point; Jesus was fully man, and He was hungry. People have come to expect it, and if you don’t, then they will wonder why. Not all people are the same. Some have a weakness for women, some for other men, and for some it’s alcohol or gambling or money and on and on and on. Satan has plenty to work with.

3. And then note that the first word out of the mouth of Satan is “if.” That word is a word of uncertainty and doubt, and it sounds very similar to the “did God really say,” spoken by Satan to Eve in the Garden. In both cases, the tempter is deliberately putting doubt into the mind of the tempted, a very common beginning to an attack on Truth and the Christian. Sometimes it works.

The attempt is to put into the mind of Jesus doubt about His very identity; “Εἰ Υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ - if you are the Son of God.” Jesus has from early on known His identity as the Son of God, and if there were some blanks that needed filling in, the voice from the sky at His very recent Baptism had brought a clarifying moment, “You are My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”

The false dichotomy; “εἰπὲ τῷ λίθῳ τούτῳ ἵνα γένηται ἄρτος – speak to the stone, that it should become bread.” The verb is in the imperative mode; Satan is commanding Jesus to do this thing, and that’s just about as twisted as it can get. The primary meaning of “ἄρτος” is bread, and the secondary meaning is food of any kind, and a stone looks like a loaf of bread, doesn’t it?

You can make the case that turning a stone into food is unnatural or ever freakish, but that's not the real problem here. The greater problem is the idea that somehow Satan can tell Jesus what to do, and that Jesus would do it! That can't be, no more than if Satan were to tell you to do – anything – you almost have to not do that thing. Besides that, it would be freakish and unnatural.

Jesus will do miracles when Jesus decides to do miracles, and not when Satan tells Him to. Jesus will do miracles of His choosing, not of Satan's, and those miracles will teach the beholder of them something about what heaven will be like. They will also be miracles that are a fixing of God's broken creation – stones are not broken – and a preview of what things will be like in heaven.

4. But we see in His own words the real problem with doing what Satan would have had Him to do, “Οὐκ ἐπ’ ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος – not from bread alone lives the man.” Firstly, and obviously, man does need food bread to live, and bread has historically been the most common food. Not so obvious, emphatic “ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι θεοῦ - but from every word of God.”

That saying is a textual variant, and looking at the apparatus, it's a textual tossup whether or not it should be included in this text. The textual case for very similar words in Matthew is much stronger, and since prior to the three-year lectionary that was the only one anybody ever heard, the phrase about man living by the Word of God has become fixed in the minds of most people.

Looking only at the first phrase (“not from bread alone man lives”), we find no variants in either of the Evangelists. Looking at Deuteronomy 8:3, we see that Moses includes both phrases. The words are part of a rather lengthy sermon he preached right before his death and immediately prior to the entrance of Israel into the Promised Land, Joshua in the lead, Moses in the ground.

Moses is inviting his hearers to remember the wilderness years, especially how God humbled them, specifically how God used hunger and dependence on Him for food to humble them. He humbled you with hunger, then He sent manna to them “that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”

In the wilderness, they did not have food, and then God said the word, and they had abundant food in the form of manna and quail. So, Jesus is saying to Satan that He doesn't need to turn the stones into bread because His Father knows He's hungry, and if the Father thinks the Son needs food, then He will say the word and food will appear. Clearly the Father thinks the Son has got this.

By means of the Word, Jesus fights Satan, and it's consistent. Quote Ephesians, where it talks about the spiritual battle being waged and the weapons used to fight it and explain them. The Sheep will appreciate being reminded about the existence of this battle and the weapons available. They also appreciate that their Shepherd understands what they go through every day of their lives.

5. There's a WIK article on the Mount of Temptation, and it says we really don't know where it is, but we think the location is "Mount Quarantania," near Jericho. It's 1,201 feet high, not high enough to see with the natural eye what Jesus saw "ἐν στιγμή ἁρόνου – in a moment." Satan showed Jesus "πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τῆς οἰκουμένης – all the kingdoms of the inhabited world."

The ways the term "οἰκουμένης" was used in that day, it included the kingdoms would have been the entire Roman Empire at least, which at this time encompassed the Mediterranean Sea. The conquest of Britain began with Julius Caesar (55 and 54 B.C.) and was ongoing at this time. In the wider sense the word would include all locations in the world that were inhabited by people.

As for the meaning of Jesus being shown those things in a moment or in a flash, Ellicott waxes most eloquent, "The concentration of what seems an almost endless succession of images into the consciousness of a moment is eminently characteristic of the activity of the human soul in the state of ecstasy or vision." It looks like perhaps something supernatural is going on here for a moment.

It's not like Jesus had no knowledge about the "inhabited world," i.e. the places in the world where there are people, i.e. most places. The supernatural would be going on in the mind of Jesus, who is God, as He recalled – in a flash – all those places that He had, in fact, created. The temptation is that Satan is offering Him all those places – which at any rate already belong to Him.

6. There may be something to the idea that the temptation here is to instant gratification rather than choosing the delayed gratification that includes things like suffering and the Cross. Speaking of all civilization, the offer is that there is only one ruler of it all, "Σοὶ δώσω τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἅπασαν καὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν – to you I will give all this authority, and all the glory of it."

Then the falsehood with some truth buried in it; "ὅτι ἐμοὶ παραδέδοται καὶ ὃ ἐὰν θέλω δίδωμι αὐτήν – because it has been delivered to me, and I can give it to whomever I want." The truth is that the civilized world – the places where humans dwell – have to a manner of speaking been given over to Satan after the Fall. Jesus calls it "the world," and affirms Satan to be the ruler of it.

That being the case, it's not true that the world is Satan's to give to whomever he wants. He may rule here, but he's only a tenant; God owns the property. Jesus knows all that, but what would you do if you were offered what He was offered, even knowing what He knows. The likes of Hitler and Stalin – as well as multitudes of other – have bought and are buying into just that allure.

7. Another conditional for Jesus to be given the civilized world; "σὺ οὖν ἐὰν προσκυνήσῃς ἐνώπιον ἐμοῦ, ἔσται σοῦ πάντα – if you will worship in front of me, all this will be yours." The phrase "worship in front of me" (Matthew has "worship me") has Jesus bowing down and doing homage to Satan. If He were to do that, it would be seen as an admission of defeat, which it would be.

The crassness of the Tempter is palpable. We note here how Satan – the word means "enemy" – came to be at odds with God. Being a mere angel was not enough. This angel wanted to be like

God; he wanted to *be* God and he moved on it, launching a rebellion against his creator. He lost, but he continues to engage in guerilla warfare against God's People; he wants you for himself.

8. The quotation is allegedly (Harper Study Bible) from Deuteronomy 6:13, which reads “you shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and swear by His name.” That seems like maybe a bridge too far. The command “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” is simply First Commandment material, but it does sound a lot like Deuteronomy 6:13.

The invitation to bow down in an act of worship and submission to Satan is met with the Word of God that says we will have One God and One God Only. But can't Jesus worship Satan while continuing to worship that God? No, and Monotheism (One God), not Polytheism (many gods) is what made Christianity and before that Judaism distinct from every other religion at the time.

Since then, Monotheism has been embraced most notably by Islam, except that their one god is the wrong god. Polytheism dominated the Ancient World, and it's coming back today under monikers like “Neo-Paganism” or “Modern Paganism.” Some of the adherents to that movement are going back to the gods of their ancestors before Christianity, and some are inventing new gods.

9. Next up, Satan took Jesus to Jerusalem, up to the top of the Temple, some seventy feet off the ground, and said to Him, “Εἰ Υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, βάλε σεαυτὸν ἐντεῦθεν κάτω – if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,” and that would surely be enough to kill you. It's an invitation to go against one of the most basic inclinations of any living thing to keep on living.

10 - 11. Satan here presents suicide as a trusting and righteous act on the part of the self-murderer. He quotes the Bible, but wrongly, “γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ τοῦ διαφυλάξαι σε – it is written that He will give His angels orders concerning you, to guard you.” The quote is from Psalm 91: 11, 12, and he leaves out the key phrase “in all your ways.”

Go ahead and look at that Psalm. The meaning is that God and His angels will watch over you “in all your ways,” meaning as you live out your life on this earth. The word “way” or “road” is a common OT metaphor, and Jesus says of Himself that He is “the way” or “road.” God will look out for you as you walk with Him, but the caveat is that you can't do anything really stupid.

Like throw yourself seventy feet to the ground. Or stand in the middle on Interstate 80. Or drive too fast, or take illicit drugs, or deliberately put yourself in danger. The takeaway for the temptation to jump off the seventy-foot high temple peak is that Satan weaponizes the Bible himself, and makes the Bible say that the protection offered by God to is completely absolute.

It's not. If you jump from seventy feet, you are probably going to die or at least get smashed up a bit. Ditto if you go out and stand in the middle of the Interstate after dark. To do so would be to tempt God, as Jesus points out. The promise to give divine protection is a promise to protect you as you live out your life, using the common-sense God gave you, not jumping off of buildings.

12. The quote is from Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not put the Lord to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.” We find their testing of Him in Exodus 17: 2, 7, during the wilderness time, at Rephidim, where the thirsty and grumbling people – they did that a lot – doubted God would give them water. Moses said (2) that they were “putting the Lord to the test” by their lack of faith.

Then Moses struck a rock, and water came out of it, and the thirsty people drank, and Moses (7) “called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the faultfinding of the children of Israel, and because they put the Lord to the test by saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” By

In fact, you might say that He makes the case that Satan has a problem; he has a serious lack of faith. It was that lack of faith – and wanting to be God – that got him booted in the first place. How antithetical is Satan here to Jesus; the Son with absolute trust in the Father’s benevolence, and on the other side the fallen angel using lies and deceit to try to manipulate Him from that trust.

13. The temptations end when “συντελέσας πάντα πειρασμὸν ὁ διάβολος – the Devil completed every temptation,” and it’s unclear if there were more, but almost certainly they were not limited to these three. More likely, Satan went through the whole battery of temptations, poking and prodding for the weak spot in Jesus’ armor. Finding none, he gives it up, at least for now.

He gives it up and “ἀπέστη ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ ἄχρι καιροῦ - departed from Him until a better time.” Perhaps Satan regroupes, rethinks his strategy, or simply recognizes when he’s whipped. The better time will be on Good Friday, on the cross, the ultimate temptation, where priests, soldiers, and the crowds will become his mouthpiece, telling Jesus “If you are the Son of God,” do what we say,

Law/Gospel

Win/Lose or Winners/Losers - People are very familiar with these concepts and they know that it’s better to be a winner than to be a loser. The World often thinks of Christians as “losers.” Sometimes they will even verbalize it, and sometimes it looks like they are correct. But in the way that a good story often unfolds, things are not as they seem!

If you want to go in a slightly different direction, you can talk about how we are “losers” before God because of our sin. That’s the Law, and if you use that word you’ll get their attention. The shepherd is the one who determines how much and how severe that Law should be. The rule is that the harsher the Law, the sweeter will be the Gospel.

First Adam/Second Adam - A sermon on this theme would be essentially a compare and contrast between the manner in which Eve and Adam handled temptation and the manner in which Jesus did. Bad news; Eve and Adam were unsuccessful. Worse news; so are we. Good News; Jesus was successful! Great News; His success is our success! Paul talks about the First and Second Adam at length in 1 Corinthians. .

Give In/Resist - Because we give in to temptation, we have earned eternal damnation. Because Jesus has not, He has earned for us eternal salvation. “The wages (payment) of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Unarmed/Armed - Of ourselves we are unable to withstand the attacks of the Enemy. God has given us the Spirit of Truth and armed with those things mentioned in the Ephesians “Armor of God” section. We are no longer defenseless. NB: don’t forget that, even with these weapons at our disposal, we still fail and are in need of the Gospel.

Impossible/Very Possible - Certain - If we understand, like James says, that to “offend in one point is to offend in all,” we understand that it is utterly impossible for one to save oneself. It’s been tried before, unsuccessfully. The only successful case was that of Jesus. Because of the vicarious atonement, it is not only possible to be saved, but it is certain. Because it is of God, not of man, there is no doubting. This is a good place to refer to what happened in Baptism. (If you want to do an ELCA rant, you can talk about how some churches are baptizing in the name of the “Parent, Child, and Spirit.” Ask rhetorically if that’s a valid baptism, creating uncertainty in their minds about whether or not it is. Refer to that uncertainty and make the point that using those words creates uncertainty in a place where certainty ought to be.)

Unattainable/Attainable - Attained - Probably another way of saying what has just been said.

Sermon Titles

“If”

“About Temptation”

“Anatomy of a Temptation”

Hymns

Sing Lenten hymns during the Lenten Season

Miscellany

For casual reading this week, try The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis, an excellent fictional depiction of the nuts and bolts of temptation. .

“I can resist everything except temptation.” Ogden Nash

What Do You Think of Jesus? by David Scaer is a good read on this and other times in the life of Jesus.