

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The 40 days of Lent are meant to mirror this 40 days of Jesus in the wilderness.

Our disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving

–our sacrificial use of time and treasure

– are all meant to be **a participation in this suffering of our Lord as it foreshadows his greater suffering on the cross.**

As we participate in the life of Christ – its highs and its lows

– we draw closer to Him in faith.

The story of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness begins with the word "then".

We do well to remember that the scriptures were written without chapter and verse divisions.

So, this story follows immediately on the heels of Jesus' baptism at the river Jordan.

On that day, the heavens opened and Jesus saw the Spirit descend upon him as a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Then – right after his baptism,

right after his public coming out as the Son of God

– Jesus was led by God’s Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Sometimes, people think baptism is magic to protect people from bad things.

This story shows us that baptism is not magic and not the absence of suffering.

It is the beginning of the lifelong workout of faith whose goal is eternal life.

After his baptism, Jesus does not go,

does not jump for joy,

does not volunteer,

but **is led** – not in his own power, but in the power of the Spirit – to the wilderness.

I have seen the Judean wilderness.

- It is a hostile environment.
- It resembles the desert Southwest of our own nation,
- places like Death Valley or even the Grand Canyon,
- only with more sand and less rock.
- There are no trees to speak of, no water sources, no food.

It is not a place most people would choose to go to just hang out for 40 days.

But Jesus is not there for pleasure. He is there to be tempted.

I want to linger on this word for a few minutes, **because it has a depth that is often overlooked.**

Most of us, when we hear the word “tempt” think of lust and seduction in the broadest sense.

I am tempted by sweets

–so when somebody puts Oreo cookies in front of me and says, go ahead – one won’t hurt – I find it impossible to say no.

This kind of temptation is only a small part of what is happening with Jesus in the wilderness.

The word that is translated “tempt” in our English Bibles is the Greek word for “weigh in the balance” or “put to a trial”.

- It is not a test of willpower, as we usually think of temptation.
- **It is a proving of integrity of character – of faith in God.**

It is the same word that is used in Genesis 22 when God tested Abraham by commanding him to offer his son Isaac for a sacrifice.

It is the same word that is used when God tests the people he delivered from Egypt as they wandered in the wilderness to the Promised Land in Exodus 15, 16, and 17.

Nearly every time this word is used in the Bible it is a matter of being weighed in the balance

with God’s Word on one side and people’s actions on the other.

The scales are balanced when our actions are the same as what God’s Word has commanded.

When our actions are not the same

– when God’s people disregard God’s Word and rebel against the covenant, **then there is imbalance and failure of integrity.**

For this reason, the translation “tested” or “tried” is better than temptation.

The Lord’s Prayer then directly connects us to this experience of Jesus –
do not lead us into a trial of our integrity of faith
as the Spirit led Jesus
and when we do find ourselves being tested,
deliver us from evil as you delivered him.

In the wilderness, Jesus is being tested, tried, proved, to see if his integrity in relation to God’s Word will hold up under pressure.

And what pressure it is.

First, he fasts – not just from meat, not just from sweets, not just from pizza or chips or whatever else we might give up for Lent –

He is fasting from all food – to the point of starvation.

And then he faces the expert at exploiting the weaknesses of humanity –

- the devil himself,
- the serpent from the garden of Eden,
- the great deceiver and twister of truth –
- the one who cleverly distorts the Word of God to seem the opposite of what it says.

Jesus is undergoing this test **not primarily for himself**, but for the rest of us.

When he succeeds in maintaining his identity as the Son of the Father,
the one who fulfills God's Word on earth as in heaven,

He succeeds for all of us.

And then he speaks and teaches as one with authority,

with integrity,

and with **the power to overcome even the trial of death.**

...

Dear people of God, when we were baptized, we were given a new identity – Child of God.

The Holy Spirit descended upon us by the laying on of hands and prayer.

And we were sent into the world to live in that identity with integrity and faithfulness to God's Word.

Like Jesus, our integrity as Christians is tested

- when Satan tries to deceive us regarding God's Word,
- when we are seduced by the offer of wealth and glory, and
- when our weaknesses are exploited by the evil one.

Let us recognize these times of testing as the spiritual trial they are.

And let us unite them with Jesus' own trial in the wilderness, **trusting in his victory as we endure and resist and pray for deliverance.**

In the name...