

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The First Sunday in Lent (2022)

Freed by Christ's Victory

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“Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’ ” Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.” (Matthew 4:10–11, ESV)

Immediately after His Baptism, our Lord Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The *devil*, that great slanderer, the prince of fallen angels is, according to Holy Scripture, ***“the great dragon”*** who ***“was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world— he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him”*** (Rev. 12:9 ESV). Satan is the originator of evil, he is the tempter and the great opponent of God's elect, who uses everything at his disposal to destroy faith in Christ Jesus. Thus, he engages believers in a never-ending battle. But we who have been called by the Gospel of Jesus Christ have a greater Defender, our Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ, who has *Freed us from Satan's tyranny by His Victory over sin, death, and the devil.*

As powerful as he may be Satan faces an adversary who is able to defeat him at every turn, our Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ. It was for this purpose that He came to be one of us. Humbling Himself, He gave up His heavenly glory and took on our flesh, becoming man so He could rescue us from the corruption brought into the world by Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan loves sin and agony; therefore, he loves his work of corrupting what God has made good. He loves our sin-laden and corrupted flesh and hates anything that would get in the way of what he loves, especially the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Moreover, he is fully aware of God's plan for sending His Son into the world to save mankind from what Satan loves. Therefore, Satan will do anything to hinder God's plan, even believing that he can corrupt God's holy Son.

Now we might question; does Satan really believe that he can defeat Jesus? Well let's look at his character. He believes he is greater than God. He thinks he can reject the Creator and win! Everything he does, he does to defy the will of God. He is the author of sin. Rebelling against God, he led scores of God's angels into sin; and he successfully led God's human creatures into sin. So, he has no trouble fooling himself into believing he can defeat the Son of God by leading Him into sin. St. Matthew tells us in the Gospel Reading for today that God gave Satan this opportunity, saying, ***“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”*** (Matthew 4:1, ESV)

According to His human nature, Jesus was placed under Satan's power who was permitted to tempt Him. Thus, Satan is given free rein to do all he can to lead Jesus into sin. Scripture tells us; ***“And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.”*** (Mark 1:13 ESV) During these forty days, Jesus was tempted constantly with temptations beyond our comprehension. But the text only records the last three. Those temptations on the last day of a forty fast. On this day Satan believes he can take full advantage of a thoroughly weakened Jesus.

Having fasted for forty days, Satan comes to Jesus and says, ***“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”*** (Matthew 4:3, ESV) Without question after forty days of fasting, Jesus wants something to eat. He’s hungry.

This reminds us of the time when God’s people murmured against Him as they hungered in the wilderness. They said it would have been better for them to die in Egypt rather than starve to death in the wilderness (Ex. 16:1-2). God answers their hunger with the gift of Manna, but this didn’t stop their grumbling. They continued to grumble throughout their wilderness wandering.

In contrast, Jesus, the Son of God, is led into the desert to fast for forty days and nights. Unlike the chosen people of God who failed their test in the wilderness of Sin, sinning miserably against God, Jesus does not fail. Yes, He’s hungry, but He does not murmur against God. He does not cry out for God to feed Him. Nor does He acquiesce to the urgings of the great deceiver, Satan. Instead, He who uses His divine powers to help others, refuses to use it for His own benefit, and says, ***“It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*** (Matthew 4:4, ESV)

Unable to get Jesus to turn stones into bread, Satan takes Him to the holy city of Jerusalem, specifically to the highest point of the Temple. Foolishly he thinks, I can get Jesus to do my bidding up here. Standing on the pinnacle of the Temple, Satan says to Jesus, ***“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”*** (Matthew 4:6, ESV) Satan uses Scripture to tempt our Lord, but he cites Scripture out of context and omits key parts. Citing partly from Ps. 91:11-12, he omits ***“to guard you in all your ways”*** (Psalm 91:11b, ESV) that is, God’s promise is to protect His people as they live according to the ***“ways”*** He has taught them. Thus, Psalm 91 speaks of angel guardianship for *all* who trust in God.

In this temptation Satan is asking Jesus to test God’s power to protect Him. This reminds us of the people of Israel putting God to the test in the wilderness at Massah and Meribah when they quarreled with Moses and tested the Lord, asking, ***“Is the LORD among us or not?”*** (Exodus 17:7, ESV) But Jesus will not doubt God, He will not test Him, He will not deviate from His Father’s ***“ways.”*** Trusting perfectly in His Father, Jesus responds to Satan, saying, ***“Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*** (Matthew 4:7, ESV)

Frustrated with his first two attempts to tempt Jesus, Satan then takes Him to a very high mountain and shows Him the kingdoms of the world and all their glory, saying, ***“All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”*** (Matthew 4:9, ESV) Don’t remain loyal to God, turn Your loyalty to me and I will give you everything. Is this not the history of the people of Israel? They had no more than crossed the Red Sea when quickly they lose their trust in God, believing He has abandoned them. Oh, but wait, we need a god, so they turn and worship a “golden calf.” Generation after generation the people of Israel abandon God and turn to idols. As they had in the desert, they become apostates in the land God gave them. But unlike the Israelites, our Lord Jesus does not turn from God. He does not ***“fall down and worship”*** Satan. No, remaining steadfast to God, Jesus turns to Satan and says, ***“Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.””*** (v. 10)

Today’s Gospel Reading overflows with the faithfulness of God’s humble Servant, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. At His Baptism Jesus heard God say, ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*** (Matthew 3:17, ESV) and He knows that His time in the wilderness is God’s will; it is the Spirit’s leading. Thus, our Lord will not use His divine power to murmur or reject God’s will and purpose, as did Israel in the wilderness. Here we do not see a Messiah of

power nor a Messiah who abuses or misunderstands God's power. Rather, we see a Messiah who is faithful and obedient, eager to serve God and God's people, saving them from their unfaithfulness to God, saving them from their sin.

St. Matthew closes this record of our Lord's temptation by writing, ***"Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him."*** (v. 10) The angels Champion and our Champion has prevailed. He did not falter as did Israel, he did not falter as do we. He has won the victory. He has defeated Satan and thereby *Freed us with His Victory*.

At the outset of the Gospel Reading for today, St. Matthew wrote, ***"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."*** (Matthew 4:1, ESV) Reading this, some find it remarkable that the Temptation of our Lord was God's will. But here we see a great contrast between Israel in the desert, who when tested by God, failed, and our Lord Jesus who is tempted to sin by Satan himself, and remains perfectly obedient to His Father's will. Thus, this account of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness is for our benefit, for we are tested and tempted throughout our lives. Reading the account of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, reminds us of another whom God allowed to be tempted by Satan, faithful Job.

Job, an honest man, is tested when God allows Satan to challenge his faith. But in the face of personal tragedy and unfaithful friends, Job continues to believe that God is good. Job relied on his faith to see him through his trials. In the depth of his agony he cries out, ***"For I know that my Redeemer lives."*** (Job 19:25, ESV) Job's continual trust in God proved that true faith cannot be destroyed. Thus, God vindicates him and restores to him what Satan had taken away. The book of Job shows a man whose unwavering faith overcame the attacks of Satan. We pray that if such temptation should come our way, we, too, would be as faithful as Job. However, we also know that our faith is not dependent on our human strength, but on the strength of the Holy Spirit who resides in our heart.

Our Lord Jesus taught us in His Prayer, how to ask for deliverance from temptation. In the sixth and seventh petitions of the Lord's Prayer, He tells us to pray, ***"lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*** (Matthew 6:13, ESV) Luther, in his Large Catechism reminds us; "Temptation . . . is of three kinds: of the flesh, the world, and the devil. We live in the flesh and we have the old Adam hanging around our necks; he goes to work and lures us daily into unchastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, greed and deceit, into acts of fraud and deception against our neighbor—in short, into all kinds of evil lusts which by nature cling to us and to which we are incited by the association and example of other people and by things we hear and see. All this often wounds and inflames even an innocent heart."

Thus, when our Lord tells us to pray, ***"Lead us not into temptation,"*** this petition includes more than the temptations of Satan, it also includes the temptation of our sinful flesh to lead us into sin. Thus, this petition is an indictment against our sinful nature, to which we are captive. It speaks not only of our desire to sin, but to the truth that we are sinners. We tempt ourselves into all manner of shame and vice. Yes, the world and the devil tempt us to sin, but first and foremost, we are our own worst enemy, because sin is already in our hearts, it has corrupted our flesh. Thus, when we pray, ***"Lead us not into temptation,"*** we are not asking God to refrain from leading us into sin, but rather, we are praying that God would stop our flesh from leading us to sin. We are praying that God would thwart the desires of our sinful flesh to lead us into temptation. For as we learned in Luther's Small Catechism, *"God does not tempt us to sin.*

Furthermore, Jesus leads us to pray, ***"But deliver us from evil."*** Deliver us from the evil One. Deliver us good Lord from ourselves, the world, and the devil. Deliver us from what would

assail our faith and lead us into sin. So, we pray to God for the greatest good, trusting not in princes or ourselves for these will always betray us.

There is only One who can ultimately protect us from evil, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. By His suffering and bloody death upon the Altar of the Cross, He has *Freed* us from sin, death, and the devil, His death brought *Victory* over such things. Jesus trusted the faithfulness of His Father when He faced the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Therefore, when we are tempted, we are to trust in the faithfulness of Christ, not in our works, or our pride, or anything that is our own such as will and effort. We are to rely solely on the will and work of Christ, His life, death, and resurrection to deliver us from evil. We are to rely on His gift of faith and His Means of Grace; the Gospel, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Absolution to strengthen us against temptation and to forgive us when we fail. These are the means by which He comes to us and promises He will deliver us from evil. Now, we who are *Freed by Christ's Victory* can give thanks for His great mercy while sharing our bountiful gift with others that they, too, may be delivered from evil. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.