

After his baptism, Jesus went into the desert for 40 days and nights to fast and pray. But he was not alone. The devil was with him in the desert, and he tempted him. But Jesus won. That's what we're going to talk about this morning and what this has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

LUKE 4:1-13: Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone."⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,¹⁰ for it is written, "' He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,¹¹ and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."¹² And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Sometimes, Jesus did things to demonstrate his divinity, things we cannot do, like walk on water, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead. We're happy he did these things for they give us assurance that God is present among us in his Son.

But Jesus also did things to demonstrate his humanity, like we see here in the Gospel: challenging and defeating the devil with God's Word. This is something he did for our sake, that we might understand and grow in our understanding and use of the Bible.

40 is a Bible number which is used in specific kinds of situations. For example, Noah and his family were in the ark when it rained for 40 days and nights. This was a time of trial for them. Moses himself lived for 40 years in Pharaoh's house where he resisted the temptation to live the heathen lifestyle of Pharaoh and his family. Then he lived for another 40 years in the wilderness in humility where he herded his father-in-law's sheep. And for his last 40 years he labored under the hand of God to bring Israel into the Promised Land. There are other examples of the use of the number 40 in the Bible like this, a number associated with trials, temptation, and humility.

This is our lives, isn't it? Trials, temptation, and humility. But there's also victory, victory in God's Word.

We read, **Luke 4:3-4, The devil said to (Jesus), "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."** ⁴ **And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"**

Jesus quoted Moses. Moses preached to the people of Israel, **Deuteronomy 8:2-3, "...you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.** ³ **He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna...that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**

Moses gave this message to Israel right before he died, reminding them that when they had been hungry, God fed them with bread from heaven by the power of his Word. Indeed, he fulfilled their every need with his Word. He was urging them to be thankful and to be faithful to the Lord their God. But, alas, they were never thankful or faithful.

But Jesus was faithful. He knew his Father in Heaven would give him food to eat in due time, fulfilling his every need. God's Word is filled with promises which we may cling to for strength when we're tempted to give in or give up. Sometimes I'm anxious for my work or my family, but I remind myself of God's promise. St. Peter wrote, **1st Peter 5:6-7, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty**

hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

These words calm my spirit, and I'm able to do my work and minister to my family with peace of mind, knowing that I am never alone, for God is always with me.

Jesus' 2nd temptation went like this: **Luke 4:5-8, the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.""**

Again Jesus quoted Moses. Moses said, **Deuteronomy 6:10-13 (LXX), "It shall come to pass when the Lord your God shall have brought you into the land which he swore to your fathers,... he will give you great and beautiful cities which you did not build,¹¹ houses full of all good things which you did not fill, wells dug in the rock which you did not dig, vineyards and olive orchards which you did not plant, then having eaten and been filled,¹² beware lest you forget the Lord your God who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.¹³ You shall (worship) the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.**

God fulfilled his promises to Israel when he brought them into the land of Canaan. But they were not faithful, for they worshipped and served the idols of the new land they had inherited.

Idolatry has always been a temptation. From the Garden to the present day, Satan has offered us the world if we would bow the knee. But Jesus resisted the devil and his empty promises with God's Word.

Are we tempted by the idolatry of money, sex, power? Whatever our temptation, the Word of God is our strength.

St. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, **Ephesians 6:16-17, "take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."**

It almost sounds too easy, doesn't it, that we could beat the devil with faith, salvation, and the Word of God? But that's the promise. Let us pray that. Let us live that.

Here's Jesus' third temptation: **Luke 4:9-12**, **“(The devil) took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,¹⁰ for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’¹¹ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’¹² And Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”**

This temptation includes an interesting wrinkle. The devil quoted from the Bible! You've heard people say, “You can prove anything with the Bible!” This is true, that is, out of context, which means that just because someone quotes Scripture doesn't mean he's speaking for God. In fact, the reverse may be true. This is why Martin Luther translated the Bible into the language of the German people, that they would read it for themselves and question their pastors and bishops and pope when they made claims about salvation, and money, and marriage – anything that touched their lives.

The devil quoted **Psalm 91:10-11**, which reads in part, **“(God) will command His angels concerning you, to guard you.¹¹ On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”**

If you read this entire Psalm you'd see that it is fulfilled by the Messiah, Jesus, at the Final Judgment. Thus Jesus rebuked the devil with the words of Moses: **Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah....”**

Originally, when Moses preached these words, he was warning the people not to go back to their old ways, testing God's temper, tempting God's wrath, as they did when they complained about their thirst in Massah in the Wilderness. But as we know, they did not heed his warning but fell into idolatry and disbelief, and they abandoned their relationship with God.

When the devil tempted Jesus with the promise in Psalm 91 with its allusion to the final judgment, he was trying to force his hand, taunting him with the words, **“IF you are the Son of God,”** provoking him to deal out God’s wrath.

Jesus could’ve said, “You’re getting on my nerves! The gig is up!” And then he could’ve brought down fire out of heaven and purified the creation of all evil. But what would’ve happened to us? We would’ve been condemned even before we were born. For Jesus had not yet died for the sins of the world, for you and me.

Jesus did what Israel could not do. He humbled himself before God, waiting for him to fulfill his Word in his life. He did not lose himself in the promises of the world, promises of glory and power, false promises by a false god. But he chose to wait. First, he would die for our sins and restore our relationship to our Father in Heaven, and then, and only then, would he claim his throne and come again to judge the world.

Lent is our 40 days in the wilderness. It is our time to reflect on the love of God in the heart of our Lord Jesus. It’s a time to give thanks for every good thing that the Lord has given us by the power of his Word. It’s a time to resist the temptations we experience daily, calling on the Lord when we are in trouble. And it’s a time to pray that the Lord would come again soon to finally fulfill his promise to crush the devil once and for all.

Friends in Christ, this week let us give thanks to the Lord for his Word, for therein is our hope, our confidence, our strength.

This week let us call on the Lord through the Word, that the devil would have no power over us.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.