

In today's sermon I'll proclaim the Good News  
That Jesus is the One who was tempted by the devil,  
But did not fall.

We are weak as human beings, and we easily fall into temptation.  
But Jesus, the human being, born of Mary,  
Stood as our champion against the assaults of the evil one,  
So that we, flesh and blood human beings, who place our trust in him,  
Share in his victory,  
And are free to take up our cross and follow him.

Here's how today's reading begins: **Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.**

The text specifies that he returned from the Jordan:

Do you remember what he was doing there?

Well, this is at the start of Jesus' public ministry,  
And in all the Gospels it is recorded that Jesus first of all was baptised  
By John the Baptist in the Jordan.

At Jesus' baptism a voice came from heaven that declared of Jesus: **'You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.'**

So, it is clear from the Gospels that Jesus is the Son God:

The Father himself has said it.

But in Luke's Gospel, before we get to the account of the temptation,  
We get the genealogy of Jesus.

Now for most modern people the genealogies  
Are the least interesting parts of the Bible,  
And yet when we pay attention to them God reveals important things to us.  
So, the fifteen verses of the ancestors on Jesus ends with these words:

**...son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.**

At his baptism we heard that Jesus is the Son of God,  
In his genealogy we hear that *he is also the Son of Adam.*

As Christian people we know that our first parents fell into sin  
When they were tempted.

And we know that in Adam all have sinned:

And we know that that we are made of the same flesh and blood,  
And that we have the same weaknesses.

Now Jesus comes on the scene:

He is the Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father.

And he is a real human being, born of the Virgin Mary.

He goes in to fight for us.

The text, you may have noticed, also says that Jesus was led by the Spirit  
In the wilderness, and that he was there for forty days.

This also makes us think of the nation of Israel,

Who were led by God into the wilderness,

And who wandered there for forty years.

Again, as sons of Adam, the people of Israel fell when tempted,

And again, in Jesus, the true Israel finds her champion.

Let's listen to how the reading goes on: **[Jesus] ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'**

Jesus has been fasting to the limits of human endurance,  
His body, his mind, his humanity is at its most vulnerable,  
And the devil tests who Jesus really is,  
By suggesting he turns stones into bread.

Just a comment on the devil saying 'If you are the Son of God...'

In the Greek the idea is this:

'If you are the Son of God, and you are...'

Or, at least, 'For the sake of the argument let's say that you are...'

In other words, the devil is not here arguing with Jesus about his status,  
Rather, he is suggesting that Jesus should show his divine status  
By doing what seems most natural to do: satisfy his bodily need.

This is a powerful temptation:

After all, there's nothing wrong with eating bread;

And the Father gave his children bread from heaven in the wilderness,

And Jesus will give bread in a miraculous way to the people,

And what's more, he is the Son of God – so why not?

This sort of temptation can be powerful also for us.

When we are in bodily need it is hard to think of anything else.

And as human beings all thought of right and wrong can go out the window

When we are tempted according to our appetites.

What's more we can make a spiritual argument for giving in:

God is our Father, isn't he? He would not want us to be in need...

Surely God will understand, and even approve, if we take what we need...

Even when we are well fed we can turn to food for comfort or pleasure

Or simply out of boredom,

In a way that makes food take the place of God:

More than once I've been sitting here in services meditating not of God's word,

But on what I'm going to be eating for lunch or dinner.

Not that there's anything wrong with eating food: it's a gift from God.

But we can so easily and naturally put our bodily appetites first.

But Jesus stands as our champion against this sort of temptation.

Listen to how the text goes on: **Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'**

Jesus, the Son of God, quotes Scripture in the face of temptation.

This is something to reflect on:

Sometimes we think Scripture is all well and good for theological questions,

But when it comes to human need we do better to follow our own path.

But Jesus does not act this way.

He quotes Scripture to the devil, in the face of temptation,

He quotes Scripture in which we assured by God that as human beings

We have spiritual needs that are deeper than physical needs,

That God's word is the true bread of life.

Again, this is not how we would think naturally,

It is what Jesus, our champion, reveals to us.

Jesus is then tempted a second time by the devil: **Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this**

**authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'**

The temptation seems to be something like this:

OK Jesus, we agree that you're the Son of God

That means you are on the path to the cross, the path of self-denial, suffering,

And of shame; you can avoid this by bowing down to me –

And no one is around, no one will know.

I can give to you a path to your flourishing without suffering: worship me.

The first question we could ask is: is what the devil is saying true?

I don't think there is a straightforward answer to this question.

But I think it's worth considering the power that deception has.

We know that in our world human beings can get real, transformative power,

By deceiving their hearers with visions and threats and promises.

The example of Hitler and National Socialism comes to my mind.

But of course the same sort of thing can happen

On a smaller scale in everyday life, when we listen to lies and deceit,

And give ourselves over to them, especially when we think that by doing so

We'll avoid suffering.

See what you think about this scenario:

A young bloke gets his girlfriend pregnant.

He's thinking about what will happen if they welcome the baby:

Freedom goes out the window, there'll be sleepless nights, and fatigue,

There could be shame, and anyhow,

Does he really want to be with his girl friend long term?

There's a real temptation that comes into play here:

Encourage her to get an abortion, drive her to the place,

No one will see, no one will know: the problem will simply go away.

But is it, in the long run, true?

What we can be sure of in this second temptation of Jesus.

Is that what the devil is saying is meant

To turn Jesus away from his path to the cross.

Picture, by the way, the body language of what the devil is suggesting:

That Jesus should use his human body to bow down

To the one who lies, who deceives, who murders.

Jesus, our true champion, will have none of it: **Jesus answered him, 'It is written,**

**"Worship the Lord your God,**

**and serve only him."'**

Again Jesus quotes Scripture in the face of temptation,

He quotes Scripture in which we are assured by God that as human beings,

We find our true path with God, who is the true life-giver,

And that God's word is a light for our path.

We then come to the third temptation: **Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,**

**"He will command his angels concerning you,**

**to protect you",**

**and**

**“On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’**

Here the devil’s temptation is more subtle:

Rather than appealing to Jesus’ bodily desire for good things like food,  
Or his bodily desire to avoid bad things like suffering,  
The devil is trying to get Jesus to prove his divine status  
By forcing the hand of the Father.

The devil even quotes Scripture to his purpose.

It’s like this: ‘You’re the Son of God, Jesus, we’re both agreed on that.

You put God’s word as a priority above fulfilling bodily need

And avoiding bodily suffering. That’s right: I agree, that’s how it is.

Now: God says that he’ll protect you, it’s in his word, I’ll quote it for you.

So, jump, God will hold you up.

You’re his Son, and he keeps his promises.

This is a very powerful temptation, and one that we as Christians can fall for.

We are baptised children of God, dearly loved by the Father,

He promises to care for us and to bring us safely home,

So we can convince ourselves that no matter how we act, God will be there,

That he’ll hold us up no matter what we do.

As an example, think about what can happen at church meetings:

There can be a project before us a congregation, let’s say a building project,

And the temptation can be: let’s not worry about how we will pay for it,

God will take care of that, all we need to do is step forward in faith.

In fact, by taking the leap of faith we’ll show

That we truly are God’s sons and daughters, that we are faithful to God.

It sounds like a good argument, but is it true?

We’ll Jesus, our true champion, is at the pinnacle of the temple,

And he knows that it’s one thing to be pushed:

In those circumstances, one entrusts oneself to God,

But it’s another thing jump: **Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’**

Again Jesus quotes Scripture in the face of temptation,

He quotes Scripture in which we are assured by God that as his children,

We live with wisdom as we trust the promises of our God,

And that we do not need to test God to prove our faith, or his love for us.

Our text ends this way: **When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.**

Commentators point to the fact that the devil makes his next appearance

At the end of the Gospel, when it is said, Satan enters Judas

And he goes to betray Jesus.

Our Lord in his ministry was on the way to the cross,

Where he would show that as our champion

He could not only stand firm against the temptation of the devil,

But that he could conquer death and the grave.

So let us not only learn from Jesus in how to deal with temptation,

Especially as we use God’s word when we are tempted,

Let us also put our trust in Jesus: he is our true human brother

Who knows what it is like to be tempted,

And who went to the cross to forgive our sins, and to give us hope.

So thanks be to God, who gives us the victory in Jesus Christ! Amen!