

The water is still wet on his body from his baptism when Jesus is led out into the wilderness by God's Holy Spirit. Jesus has just come up from the waters of his baptism and heard the voice of God pronounce that "this is my Son, the Beloved, in him I am well pleased." Jesus has just experienced this life affirming event when he is led out into the wilderness. Let us read what happens when Jesus is led out into the wilderness.

### **Read Matthew 4: 1-11**

Jesus has just had this life affirming event of baptism when God's Spirit leads him into a wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Usually, when parents present their infant child for baptism they have a party for the family. They invite the grandparents. They invite the family friends. They invite the pastor. They have a really nice meal and everyone talks about how cute the baby was when it was baptized.

Compare the way we do baptisms today with what Jesus' parent did for him to honor his baptism. To honor his baptism, God led Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. I can think of much better presents that a parent could give their child for their baptism.

But leading Jesus out into the wilderness is exactly the baptismal present that God gives Jesus. It is here in the wilderness that Jesus fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. You may have caught some of the significance of this number 40. Elsewhere in Scripture we read of how Noah remained in the ark while it rained for 40 days. We read in the Old Testament of how God's people wandered in the desert for 40 years. Elijah fasted for 40 days before receiving his new commission.

And, of course, this is the first Sunday of Lent, a period of 40 days excluding Sundays when we examine our lives and prepare ourselves for Easter. 40 is a very important number in the Bible. 40 comes to represent a time of challenge and spiritual devotion.

In the passage we have before us, Jesus fasts for 40 days and then he is approached by the devil. He is also called the tempter in this text. This 40 day period of fasting for Jesus becomes a time to prepare him for what is to come. And what comes before Jesus are 3 temptations.

The first temptation that Jesus encounters is the temptation of power. If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. Sounds like a pretty good demonstration of his power if you ask me. He's hungry. He could demonstrate that he has power over the natural world and he could prove that he can do anything.

The second temptation to come to Jesus concerns his fidelity to God. If he is the Son of God, throw yourself down and God will protect you. Sounds like a good opportunity for Jesus to show that he is God's son and that he is protected by God. God could have done a pretty powerful demonstration right then. But once again. Jesus resists.

The third temptation is basically a bribe. If you bow down to me, I will give you all of the kingdoms of the world. Right then and there Jesus could walk away with it all. All the chips are thrown onto the table and Jesus could seem to walk away with it all. But he refuses to do this.

Three temptations that all seem like great opportunities. Why doesn't he take them? Why doesn't he accept the chance to prove who he really is? What does he know that we don't always seem to know?

I recently read someone say that human beings each have a hole within them. Sometimes we choose things to fill this hole that proves less than filling. And could it be that we are challenged to see what we are made of? To see what we will seek to find to fill this void? To challenge us to discover where real fulfillment comes? Could it be that we face challenges to provide us opportunity to discover a real and vital relationship with God?

You know what. Life is just plain difficult at times. We face challenges and temptations within our families. We face challenges and temptations within our relationships. We face challenges and temptations in our places of work and at school. We aren't sure what is going to happen next or maybe we have just been dealt a pretty difficult blow.

But before he faced his challenges, Jesus set aside 40 days to prepare himself. 40 days to prepare himself to encounter the challenges and temptations that he underwent.

Today, of course, is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is the 40 day period when we are invited to prepare ourselves for the challenges and difficulties that life has to offer. We have an opportunity to use this 40 day period well. Some people choose this as a time to give something up. That's fine. As long as it is something that you feel that giving up whatever will help strengthen you spiritually to face the challenges in life.

Others use this as a time to add something. Maybe it is time to add something to your life like a daily Scripture reading. Jesus faced down his temptations by quoting Scriptures from the Old Testament. Or maybe you can set aside a time for daily prayer. Or maybe follow the example of our Muslim brothers and sisters and set aside some times during the day to pray to God. Maybe you can make a commitment to volunteer a certain number of hours for a worthy cause or maybe commit yourself to volunteering around the church.

We have provided some resources within this church to assist you in your walk. There is a daily devotional being sent out. There is a gathering for prayers on Sunday mornings. There is a gathering in a few weeks to reflect on your walk. There are volunteer opportunities. If none of these appeal to you, find your own way to delve deeper into your relationship with God in order to prepare yourself to face the challenges that are coming into your life.

The number 40 is very important in the Bible as a time for spiritual renewal. 40 is a period to be prepared to face challenges. These 40 days are an opportunity to prepare for what may be ahead. AMEN.

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-Text: Matthew 4: 1-11

-Given: March 13, 2011 at Allison Creek (York) and the Presbyterian Home of Lexington, SC