

## **THEME: The Way: In the Footsteps of Jesus**

### ***“The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton

February 16-17, 2013 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

#### **Mark 1: 9-13**

*9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.” 12 The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, 13 where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.*

**VIDEO      Sermon Starter – The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus**

**SLIDE      Baptism and Temptation of Jesus**

I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. There is a place for you to take notes and there are pens and pencils in the pew pockets in front of you and I hope you will take some time to write anything down that you want to remember from today's message. If you are watching at home or online I invite you to take out a piece of paper and something to write with and then you can download this resource off our website later. You also will find daily Scripture readings and questions to think about throughout the week. I really want to encourage you during this season of Lent, which is the 40 days and 7 Sundays before Easter, to make this a daily discipline.

Today we begin a new sermon series on Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus, in which we look at historical background, archeological findings, and stories of faith to retrace the footsteps of Jesus from his baptism and temptation in the desert to his crucifixion and resurrection. Along the way we will meet the people he loved and healed, the enemies he made, listen to the parables he taught and see some of the roads he traveled. We are going to try and understand Jesus more clearly and go deeper in our own faith during this series of sermons.

We are going to start where Mark's gospel begins, which is with the baptism and temptation of Jesus. The map that you have inside your bulletin is going to give you a layout each week of where we are going to go.

**SLIDE      Map of Holy Land**

I want to remind you that the holy land is divided into three sections. The bottom section is known as Judea and is where the city of Jerusalem is located. This is where the crucifixion and resurrection take place and we will actually begin in this region today. The middle section is known as Samaria and the upper section is known as the Galilee, which contains the Sea of Galilee where most of Jesus' public ministry took place.

Today we begin our journey in the area of Qumran which was the home of the Essenes which is a monastic group. They lived overlooking the Dead Sea and it was here that the Dead Sea Scrolls were composed.

**SLIDE      Close Up Map with Qumran and Jordan River**

In all likelihood it is in Qumran where John the Baptist lived and where his practice of baptism was clarified. We will take a look at the Jordan River and the area where it is most likely that Jesus was baptized, not far from the Dead Sea. Finally, we will go to the mount of temptation where it is believed that Jesus was tempted while he stayed in the wilderness. There is a monastery in this place where tradition tells us that Jesus slept during those 40 days and 40 nights that he was in the wilderness.

**SLIDE      Qumran ruins**

Here is a picture of the ruins at Qumran. The people who lived in this monastic community were known as the Essenes. There is no doubt that they heavily influenced John the Baptist and his thinking. He may have been raised here as a young boy, but eventually he left to invite the entire world to come and be baptized. This community believed in ritual purification. Every day, multiple times a day, they would step into baths that looked like this.

**SLIDE      Mikvat 1**

These were known as water baths or *Mikvat*. This is probably the background to John the Baptist's own work baptizing the people in the Jordan River. The idea was ritual purification in which they would step into the water,

purify themselves as the water washed over them, and then stepped out of the waters and they would be ready to eat or whatever else they were doing that day.

**SLIDE            Mikvat 2**

This *Mikvat* that you see in this photo is one where you would literally walk in one end of the baptismal waters and then walk out the other end, symbolizing that you are leaving behind anything bad that you had received on you during that day. There were seven of these baths and as you look down inside you can see it there covered in plaster. They would come down one set of stairs unclean and needing to be purified and step down into the water. As they stepped in the water they would immerse themselves and pray for God to purify themselves and make them holy. They would step out the other set of stairs as a way of saying, "I am different now. I have been purified."

The Essenes were trying to get away from the world so they could be pure and holy. John the Baptist left that community so that he could preach to the whole countryside and teach them about being purified. He clearly understood that it wasn't just about staying within the walls of a monastery, but that the word of God needed to be taken out in the world.

**VIDEO            Map from Qumran to Jordan River**

**SLIDE            Jordan River Baptism Site**

As we look at the map on the video screen you will notice that is not far from Qumran to the Jordan River. You will notice that this area is near the town of Jericho and is not far from where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea. Remember that the children of Israel came across the Jordan River somewhere in this area as they crossed into the Promised Land some 2000 years before Jesus. It is this area that John the Baptist began his ministry of proclaiming that the Messiah was coming and inviting people into the waters to be baptized and prepared for that holy moment. People came from Jerusalem which was only a few miles from here, as well as the entire countryside, in order to hear this message and be baptized.

The Scripture tells us that Jesus came from the Galilee and his hometown of Nazareth, making the eight-day journey to this place that you see on the video screen. It was here that he was baptized by John the Baptist.

**VIDEO            Jordan River Baptism**

## **SLIDE      Jordan River Baptism**

You see the video footage on the screen of people being baptized in that place where it is believed that Jesus was baptized on the Jordan River. If you take a trip to the holy land you can experience this for yourself and get in the water and remember your baptism as many of these people are doing.

Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River not because he was a sinner in need of saving but to model for the rest of us what it means to become a part of God's family. He was leading us and showing us how we can begin to experience new life as he entered into the waters of baptism. There has been great debate about the meaning of the baptism of Jesus over the years.

## **SLIDE      A desire to be purified by God**

First, Jesus was modeling for us how powerful it is to be purified by God and how many of us long to be made clean from some of the things of our past. First century Judaism was used to this idea of ritual purification and being made clean and whole and the site of God.

It also seems that if someone converted to Judaism they would go to this ritual purification as a way of symbolizing a cleansing that happens from the old person they had been into the new person they were as part of God's covenant people. As they went into the water and then came out of the water they were born anew, as a child of Israel. They were no longer Gentile because they had been reborn into Judaism.

## **SLIDE      Becoming part of God's people**

So there were two ideas wrapped up in baptism at the time of Jesus. This was seen as an initiation into God's people and it also represented a desire to be purified by God. It was an opportunity for the person to say, "Lord, I'm sorry that I turned away from your path."

So the people came as John called them to repent, which means to turn and think differently afterwards. It is about having a change of heart and a change of mind which results in a change of life and a change of behavior. This change was symbolized by water which could cleanse and literally wash off dirt from the body.

## **SLIDE      Dead Sea**

Another powerful image is to recognize as we look at this picture of the Jordan River that this water flows downstream and into the Dead Sea. You might remember that in the Dead Sea, nothing can live. The idea is that your sins are carried away, never to be remembered again. You were washed and you were clean and you were made new and the old part of you died while a new part of you is reborn into God's kingdom.

Several times I have baptized people who come from pretty interesting backgrounds that are rough and filled with hurt and pain and sorrow and difficulty. I can remember on several occasions people looking at me and saying, "Pastor, does this really mean that I am clean after this? Can God really take away all of that old stench from my past life?" They could feel that as they came out of the water and there is this sense that you are completely forgiven. Whatever your past has been, God has washed away those sins and they are carried away. It is so clear in the Jordan River that those things are washed away into the Dead Sea where nothing can live again.

#### **SLIDE          Baptism in the Christian faith**

Let's talk about baptism in the Christian faith for a moment. Within the first 50 years of the Christian faith baptism was becoming a common part of the Christian tradition. We find the apostle Paul baptizing people who were converting into the Christian faith, who were Gentiles. For Christians this became a sign of the decision to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus was baptized first and we follow him in baptism. This is a way for us to express, "I am a follower of Jesus. I have repented of my sin in my past life. I've been claimed by God."

In the book of Acts chapter 16 we find to entire families or households which included a mother and a father and little children being baptized. The baptism of children already happens in Acts 16 and by the time we get to the end of the first century and early second century we see that is a common practice for families to baptize their young children. It was a sign not only of forgiveness and grace and letting go of the past, but also it was a promise for the future that God would forgive. It was a way of clearly saying that this child belongs to Christ.

Before the end of the New Testament period, baptism was being seen as a Christian equivalent to circumcision. Circumcision was administered on the eighth day after a child was born as a way of Jewish families making a commitment to raise their child in the faith and declaring that their child was part of God's

covenant people. Children didn't choose circumcision and it was a sign that there was a covenant between this child and God.

As people who were not Jewish became followers of Christ who was the Jewish Messiah, the question began to be asked, "How do we know that they are part of God's covenant people?" This was especially challenging when you had widows and older men who were converting to the Christian faith. I am pretty sure that the older men didn't want to be circumcised and the women who were widows had no way of marrying a Jewish man and so it was that the apostle Paul began to call baptism, "circumcision of the heart."

Baptism was a moving idea from John the Baptist and the ritual of purification with the Essenes, to a sign of repentance and turning in a new direction, to being a child of God and claimed by God. Baptism has come to be a sign of following Jesus and this idea of being in covenant with God through Jesus Christ.

All of these ideas are present in the sacrament of baptism and so there are some churches who only baptize those who are old enough to express their own faith. They are following one example or meaning of baptism and it is a very powerful way of understanding this experience. Those of us who baptize infants are following another one of the New Testament means of baptism. You can find that all of these meanings are covered in the richness of baptism which is why I encourage you not to fight or be worked up over which understanding of baptism you claim or cling to. There is a way for us to claim believer baptism and there is a way for us to claim infant baptism. There is an appropriate and biblical expression of each of these ways of understanding how we enter into a covenant with God through baptism.

I want to remind you of what happens in the text when Jesus is baptized. This is what we read in Mark's Gospel.

**SLIDE**        ***9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."***

There are four things that we see in the baptism of Jesus that we are meant to experience in our own baptism.

**SLIDE      You receive the Holy Spirit**

The first thing that we see is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the bodily form of a dove. From that time forward we Christians have believed that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us and works within our heart. That is why we pray at the end of each baptism, "The Holy Spirit work within you that you will become a faithful follower of Jesus Christ."

**SLIDE      You are claimed by God**

The second thing that we see is that we are God's children. When we are baptized, we are claimed by God and we recognize that we become a part of God's family. We baptize in the name of God the father and Jesus the Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit as a way of recognizing that, "This one belongs to God." Even if you don't remember your baptism because you were an infant, God claims you as his child and has said, "You belong to me."

**SLIDE      You bring God great joy**

The third thing that we see is this idea of how we bring God great joy as his children. He is saying that first, there was Jesus and Jesus was the unique son of God and in a way different from all the rest of us a how we are chosen. But nonetheless, in our own baptism, God claims us as his children and he says, "You belong to me and you bring me great joy." You were made by God to be loved by God and we see that in this passage of Scripture very clearly.

**SLIDE      You are commissioned to serve God**

Finally, we see that the baptism of Jesus was the beginning of his public ministry. In his baptism Jesus was commissioned and so it is with you. When you are baptized, whether it is as an infant or an adult, this is a commissioning and God has said, "Now, you are to go out and live the gospel and be the presence of my son Jesus Christ in the world." You are not baptized into a pew, but into the ministry of Jesus Christ! Each one of us is a minister who is called by God to serve and bring about the kingdom of God.

So in our baptisms, we receive the Holy Spirit, God claims us as his children, we bring great joy to God and we are commissioned to do God's work in the world. Our hope today is that you would remember your all baptism and recognize that you belong to God. The Holy Spirit is at work within you and God has a mission and a ministry for you and for your life. This is why at the end of the

service today we are going to invite you to come to any of the stations around the room and remember your baptism and be thankful. If you have never been baptized we would love to just give you a blessing and then we would love to talk to you about baptism and how that might happen in your life. If you have never been baptized we hope that you will plan to be baptized. We played some video clips of people being baptized in our River baptism service this last August and we do one of those at the end of every summer. We also baptize children and adults here in the sanctuary during worship services.

I actually received this water from the River Jordan as a gift from someone in our congregation and we have placed a little bit of it in each of the baptismal fonts so that you can experience baptism from the River Jordan in a small way. When you get in the water in the Pine River or the Animas River which we have used for our River baptism services, it can be quite a shocking experience because the water is pretty cold even in August. Stepping into the water is the way of recognizing, "I am in need of God's forgiveness and grace. I am in need of God's washing and being made whole again. I remember the radical nature of God's grace and that God watches us clean regardless of what our past has been. The water is a sign of how God takes away all that is old and makes us new again."

The great reformer Martin Luther struggled with depression and whether or not he was worthy of God's love. When he would get up in the morning he would look in the looking glass and say, "Martin Luther you are baptized. Don't forget what that means. You belong to God. God has promised to walk with you every single day, to never leave you or forsake you. It means that you have value and worth in God's eyes." That is part of what your baptism means and I hope you will claim that every single day as you look in the mirror each morning. Today I want you to remember your baptism and be thankful.

## **SLIDE        Jesus is Tempted**

Let's turn now and see what happens next for Jesus as he begins his public ministry. He immediately is driven by the spirit to the mount of temptation. This is what often happens to us after we have a high point in our spiritual lives. We have a pinnacle experience with God and we sensed God's presence and we commit our lives to God and then, almost immediately we experience hard times or difficulty. We can experience temptation that might lead us astray and that is exactly what happened for Jesus. He was intentionally led by God to be tested,

tempted, tried and strengthened by those temptations for the journey ahead. The Scripture tells us this in the gospel story this morning.

**SLIDE**        ***12 The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, 13 where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.***

If you take a look on the video screen you will see a map that once again will take us from the Jordan River to the area where it is believed that Jesus was tempted.

**VIDEO**        **Map Jordan River to Judean Wilderness**

**SLIDE**        **Map close-up of Holy Land**

It was in this area, for 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus went without food and he was tested and tempted in preparation for his public ministry. As early as the 300s there were monks that began to inhabit the caves that were in this place as a way of identifying with Jesus Christ. Once again we sometimes have an idea that the things we read about in the Scripture are just a fairytale or a story, so let's take a look at the wilderness where Jesus was said to be tempted.

**VIDEO**        **Mount of Temptation Monastery**

You can see this wilderness area with the monastery built into the side of the hill. This monastery it is built over the cave where it is said that Jesus slept during this time of temptation. You're going to see in this next photo a picture of the cave which is inside of this monastery.

**SLIDE**        **Mount of Temptation Cave Wide**

It is said that Jesus slept here and this entire monastery was built around this cave. This smaller cave is where it is said that Jesus actually slept. When you are inside this cave you can imagine that Jesus spent those 40 nights sleeping in this place as he was tempted and tested by the devil.

**SLIDE**        **Mount of Temptation Cave**

This small room is about 8 feet wide and 4 feet deep. This is the space were Christians have remembered and thought of Jesus sleeping during his 40 days of temptation. There are prayer request cards and pictures of their loved ones, as well as the lighting candles in honor of those they remember.

**SLIDE**        **Mount of Temptation Prayer Candles**

This is a special place to pray and connect with Jesus himself for Christian pilgrims who remember the time of Jesus in the wilderness. There are other caves in this wilderness area and in the time of Jesus it may have looked more like this wilderness area and cave that you see in the video.

**VIDEO**      **Desert Wilderness Cave**

**SLIDE**      **Jesus is Tempted**

This is the area where prophets came to discern God's will and God's calling as they made their way out in the desert and would find a cave like the one you see on the video screen. Elijah the prophet came from areas not far from here in order to hear the still, small voice of God for 40 days and 40 nights as he fasted and seeking God. Moses was in the wilderness and up on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights seeking God. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus began his public ministry, after being baptized, by coming to this wilderness area and seeking God for 40 days and 40 nights. It was in this place that his resolve was tested and he was tempted.

Mark only gives us a brief description of that time the desert for Jesus, but Luke and Matthew describes the temptation itself in this way.

**SLIDE**      ***1 Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.***

***3 Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, change this stone into a loaf of bread."***

***4 But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone.'"***

***5 Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 "I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them," the devil said, "because they are mine to give to anyone I please. 7 I will give it all to you if you will worship me."***

***8 Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"***

***9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! 10 For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect and guard you. 11 And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"***

***12 Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the Lord your God.'" 13 When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.***

**SLIDE      Jesus was tempted like we are tempted**

There are several important things to note about this time of temptation for Jesus. First, we recognize that Jesus was tempted just like we are tempted. Each of us are constantly tempted to do things that are destructive and that take us away from God and from each other. My guess is that Jesus was tempted just the way that we're tempted. When I am tempted I don't see a devil that shows up in spandex with a pitchfork and a forked tail. Instead, I hear a whisper in my head, "You don't really need to do that. You really should do that."

Inside, I know that is not the path that God wants me to take, but I hear this whisper and his calling of my name encouraging me to go in a direction away from God and away from life. Sometimes it is a whisper that tells me not to do this thing that I know God wants me to do. Sometimes it is a whisper that begs me to do that thing which I know will lead to pain and hurt, even though it might feel good in the moment. Whichever way it happens, I know that I struggle with temptation and all of us do as well, every day.

Jesus experienced this for 40 days and 40 nights, proving his resolve as it tested his strength. Notice that the first temptation is a very human one because Jesus has been fasting and he is hungry. With all of the stones that were around him, the devil pointed out to him that all he needed to do to end his fast and to feed his hunger was take some of those stones and turn them into bread. The devil whispers in his ear, "I know you have made this commitment to not eat for the next 40 days, but you have to be hungry. I know you're trying to follow God, but you don't really need to do that. Just stop your fasting now and pick up one of these beautiful stones and turning into bread."

Jesus had the power to do just that. He could have worked a miracle to feed himself and left his fasting behind. It is interesting that every year when I fast

and give up something for the season of lent, there are moments when I'm struggling I desperately want that thing which I have given up for the season. It is easy to give in to that temptation and take that thing, especially when the rest of my family is enjoying it! Jesus was tempted during those 40 days even though he had promised and committed to God that he wouldn't eat. He was joining with Moses and Elijah in fasting but he could've given in.

His first test was to use his own powers to satisfy his own needs, but also to give up the fast and break it before he was ready. Some have suggested that the other reason this temptation is here is for us to see that Jesus was tempted to simply do magic tricks and feed people and turn them towards him and get them to follow him by doing things like making food out of rocks. But that would've taken away from the truth that Jesus was the bread of life. It was Jesus himself that God was offering to the world. Jesus was the manna from heaven which would satisfy people's hearts, not simply the bread they could eat and get their stomachs filled for a day.

The second temptation that Jesus faced was when the devil said to him, "I will give you all the splendor of the world." He showed Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world from the top of that mountain where you could see cities all around the wilderness. It was perhaps from this place that the devil said, "Look at Jericho and Jerusalem. All of that wealth is mine to give to you. If you would just follow my path then you can have it all."

We all struggle with that temptation. In my own life I find that it is so easy to be tempted to pursue the dollar and power and wealth, and not to pursue the kingdom of God. There is a temptation not to give to God what belongs to God, but instead hold onto it for myself. How easy it is to make the dollar our God, which is why Jesus was continually saying to people, "You have to decide. You cannot serve both God and money. You will love one and hate the other. One will be your master and the other you will disregard."

I am grateful for this temptation of Jesus in the Gospels because we find that Jesus was tempted by the very same things that we are tempted with here in 21st-century America. We are tempted with a desire for more and not putting God first in our lives. Jesus wrestled with this as well and said that he would not take that direction. He said, "I am going to take a way that leads to the cross, not too great wealth and power."

Finally, Jesus was taken to the pinnacle of the temple. Here he was tempted to do a miracle which was indisputable. If he would throw himself off the Temple, he could prove to himself that he was really the son of God. You could also prove it to everyone else because the Angels would save him. In this temptation we find that Jesus is probably wrestling with whether he really can trust God. Does he really trust the experience that he had with God at the river when the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove? Does he trust that what he knows inside is true about himself being a child of God? Does he trust that God find great joy in him?

All of us have these faith crises in our lives. I can remember being at a fall retreat with my youth group when I was a youth pastor and a young woman had this powerful experience up on the mountaintop with the colors changing in the Rocky Mountains. We took communion outdoors that day and she had this tremendous look of joy on her face. She later talked about how she felt the Holy Spirit filling her life and filling her heart and she found great joy as the wind blew through her hair and the blue sky was crystal above. Just a few months later she came into my office and she was wondering if she really felt that. She asked, "Did it really happen, Jeff? Did I just make it up? Is there really a God?"

Many of us continue to wrestle with those kinds of questions. What was so real to us in one moment becomes much less clear as we move further away from that moment and we struggle with what is really true. It begins to seem less real and less true and we question. Maybe you have had experiences like that. You have sensed God's presence and you knew that God was real and you trusted in that love that he had for you. But the further away you got from that experience, the more you begin to doubt and wonder. That is where Jesus was in this temptation.

It is interesting that in every one of these temptations the response of Jesus was to quote Scripture. This tells us that Jesus had Scripture buried in his heart. He had studied the Scriptures and he knew the one way to resist temptation and to counteract the whispering of the devil in his ears, was to know the Scriptures and how they speak into our life situations, and to respond by quoting them to ourselves and to the devil himself when we hear those whispers.

That's part of the reason why we give you meditation moments each week and ask that you try to connect to a small group where you are studying Scripture every day. We want you to know the Scriptures so that when you hear the devil or

something that is completely counter to the Scriptures, you are able to say, "People don't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

"You shall worship the Lord and only him alone would you serve," or "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus knew the Scriptures and he was able to respond with them and they gave him strength and encouragement and the ability to resist the devil in the midst of those temptation moments.

Of course that was not the end of the temptations that Jesus experienced in his life and ministry. Throughout his time teaching and preaching and living out the word of God, Jesus experienced whispering from the devil trying to get him to leave the path that God has set him up on. He was encouraged time and again to go a different way, but all the way until the end and his final night upon the earth, when he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane and said, "Lord, please take this cup from me," Jesus still refused to give up on God. His answer was always the same, "Yet not my will but thy will be done."

My hope and prayer for you every day as your pastor is that you might know some Scriptures so well that when you hear the devil whisper in your ear to do something that is counter to what God wants for your life, you can instantly say that you know it's not right because the Scripture says otherwise. More than that, my hope is that you would pray the same prayer of Jesus when he said, "Not my will but thy will be done."

As we look at the baptism and temptation of Jesus I take away from it this powerful idea that from the very beginning Jesus understood who he was and whose he was. He knew that he would have to deal with temptation and he was able to push back against that, reminding us that as we deal with temptation the best solution is to have the word of God buried in our hearts. That is why we have these small travel Bibles available for you to carry in your pocket or in your purse or your backpack. We want you to carry this with you as a shield so that when you are tempted, and you will be tempted, you will have something to turn to that will give you strength and encouragement.

This season of lent, the 40 days and seven Sundays before he died, Easter, is a time for us to remember the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. We recognize that Jesus was tempted and we recognize our own humanity and our own tendency to fall short and make mistakes and make choices that we wish we

hadn't made. We also recognize our need for a Savior, because the truth is that other than Jesus there is no human that will always say "no" to temptation always and all the time. I don't do it and you don't do it. Even in the last week you have succumbed to temptation at some point. You heard the whispers of the devil and you have said, "yes," and you carry that with you today.

Part of the reason why lent is a season to remember the 40 days of temptation for Jesus is because we are tempted and because we don't always acknowledge that we are in need of a Savior. We are in need of the climax that comes at the end of the season of lent, Jesus hanging on a cross and giving his life for us offering us forgiveness and grace.

My hope and prayer today is that you have been blessed as we have looked at the baptism and temptation stories of Jesus. I hope each of us understand more clearly what baptism means and that maybe today you might remember your baptism in a special way. I hope you will remember that you belong to God and that you were made by God to be loved by God. The Holy Spirit is working within you and God has a ministry for you.

The fact that Christ was tempted just like we are means that he understands how we wrestle with temptation. Jesus didn't succumb to that but because we are not Christ and we sometimes do, Christ gave his life that we might have forgiveness and grace. May you find the strength to pray every day, "Lord, not my will but thy will be done."

Would you bow and pray with me?

**SLIDE          Prayer**

I recognize that some of you may have never come forward and renewed your baptism. Some of you may never have been baptized and you are still unsure about who you are or whose you are. Whatever place you have found yourself in today, I encourage you to pray something like this.

*Lord, I want to be yours. I want to know that I am part of your family today.*

*Help me to follow you and receive your gift of grace and mercy.*

*Thank you that you made me to love me and you find great joy in my life.*

*When I am tempted, give me your word upon my heart that I might move in a different direction.*

*Thank you for your gift of mercy and grace and forgiveness.*

*We love and praise you, and in your holy name we pray. Amen.*

# ***“The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus”***

## **Theme: The Way: Walking In the Footsteps of Jesus**

**Scripture: Mark 1:9-13**

**Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:**

---

---

---

**Meditation Moments for Monday, February 17** – Read Mark 1:9-11 – Mark's gospel is concise and action-oriented, so it's no surprise that he gave the shortest account of Jesus' baptism we have. The text simply tells what happened, not what led up to it or how the participants felt. But what happened set the stage for Jesus' entire ministry. He was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and the voice from heaven affirmed that he was God's Son.

- Mark used the Greek verb *schizo* to portray what Jesus saw happen to “heaven” (which in New Testament Greek meant the place where God dwells). Mark 15:38 used the same verb, saying the Temple veil was torn in two as Jesus died. In what ways has Jesus' life and death “torn open” heaven for you, and allowed you to move into a closer relationship with God?
- We sometimes think that the Holy Spirit didn't show up until Pentecost, after Jesus' resurrection. However, the Bible (using words that also mean “breath” or “wind”) describes God's Spirit at work throughout history, even at creation (see Genesis 1:2). In what ways have you sensed God's Spirit guiding, comforting or encouraging you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you that because of your baptism (and your life, death and resurrection) I, too, may hear God say to me, “You are my child, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.” Amen.

**Tuesday, February 17** – Read Matthew 3:13-17 – John (who called people to repent and baptized them when they did) tried to stop Jesus from being baptized. He had said that the one coming after him would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11). He saw Jesus as that sinless savior, and felt unworthy. But Jesus said, “This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus modeled baptism for us. We value our baptisms as a sign that we choose to follow Jesus, and let him direct our lives.

- Baptism is a type of washing. We come to God tired and defiled and are washed clean, given a fresh start. Jesus did not need that kind of baptism—he was sinless. Yet he humbly asked to be baptized anyway. Jesus did “what was necessary for us, humbling himself and identifying with our humanity (see Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 2:11-18). What does that tell you about how much he values you?

**Prayer:** Lord, I yearn to be connected to you and what you've been doing throughout human history. I give myself anew to you today. Amen.

**Wednesday, February 17** – Read John 1:29-37 – The gospel of John focused more deeply on the meaning of events. Here we “see” Jesus' baptism when the baptizer points him out to his followers as “the Lamb of God,” and recalls seeing the Spirit descend on him. We see the result of this powerful testimony, too. Two of John's disciples took his words seriously, and immediately began following Jesus.

- “The Lamb of God, who takes the sin of the world!” evoked Jews' annual sacrifice of a spotless Passover lamb, recalling God freeing them from Egypt and pointing to the Messiah, the ultimate deliverer. It also evoked Isaiah 53:7's picture of God's suffering servant—“Like a lamb being brought to slaughter....he didn't open his mouth.” In neither their world nor ours was

the lamb a symbol of power. What does this tell you about God's divine idea of true strength? What kind of strength is God leading you to develop in your own heart, and with your family, friends, and coworkers?

- We don't read about any conflict when two of John's followers set off after Jesus. John saw his life mission being about leading people to Jesus (see John 3:28-30.) How can a desire for credit or status get in the way of your life carrying out its deepest mission?

**Prayer:** O Lamb of God, thank you for taking away my sins! I'm thankful for water baptism's symbol of your cleansing me, but I most want the inner baptism of your Spirit to help me grow into all you want me to be. Amen.

**Thursday, February 17 – Read Romans 6:1-7** – In Romans 5:20, Paul wrote that “where sin increased, grace multiplied even more.” It seems that some of his opponents tried to discredit his trust in God's grace by saying, “Let's keep sinning, so that there can be even more grace.” Absolutely not, Paul replied. We can't truly accept God's grace without dying to that old way of living, and our baptism is the way we show that we're serious about that.

- Christ's followers through the centuries have wrestled with the paradox that, even as we “walk in newness of life,” we still fall short of God's ideal again and again. (Paul himself stated the other side of this paradox in Romans 7:14-25.) In what ways have you seen Christ's gift of new life break the ruling power of sin in your life? What are the ongoing areas of struggle in your life?
- The *New Interpreter's Bible* notes that Paul's words are about status as the source of actions, “like saying ‘shall we remain in France,’ assuming that if one does one will continue to speak French.” How, in Christ, can you “declare independence” from your old status as a sinner, even as you keep seeking to grow beyond certain acts of sin?

**Prayer:** Lord, free me more and more from the habits and ways of thinking that keep me enslaved. Guide me so that I may “walk in newness of life” with you. Amen.

**Friday, February 17 – Read Matthew 4:1-11** – God's people, Israel, wandered in the desert for 40 years before they entered the Promised Land. The Israelites gave in to the temptation to distrust God (see Numbers 14:28-34). Jesus, God's son, spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness. He, too, was tempted, but did not succumb. He loved and trusted God, and built his life on the Bible's principles.

- Unlike Jesus, you've probably never been tempted to turn stones to bread. The temptation “fit” him—he could use his power to be the political, material kind of messiah most Israelites hoped for. In what ways have you been tempted to use your unique abilities and powers for your own glory and advancement, rather than to bless others and build God's kingdom?
- Jesus met temptation with scripture and we can too. Author Gary Smalley advises us to learn Philippians 4:8-9, and check temptations and choices against it before we act: “...if anything is excellent, if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, all that is worthy of praise.” What other Bible passages help you resist the lure of evil? Do you, like Jesus, make memorizing key Bible passages part of your life with God?

**Prayer:** Lord, every day I'm tempted to take my eyes off you. Please help me treasure your word enough to learn it, and bring it to my mind when I need to resist temptation. Amen.

**Saturday, February 17 – Read Luke 4:1-13** – Luke slightly altered Matthew's account of the temptations. He said Jesus “was tempted for forty days by the devil.” He also reversed the last two temptations, perhaps so that the sequence began and ended by emphasizing Jesus' standing as God's son, and the regular temptation to doubt that. Matthew contrasted Jesus' success in withstanding temptation to Israel's failure in the wilderness. Luke went even farther—his genealogy of Jesus ended, in Luke 3:38, with “Adam, son of God.” That son of God failed when tempted, but Jesus did not.

- Each wilderness temptation Jesus faced involved an easier path to being the messiah Israel thought they wanted. “Dazzle them with signs, impress them with your power, meet their material needs,” the tempter whispered. “Why try to change their earthly focus, and face suffering and death?” In what ways are you tempted to follow Jesus only if it's easy and doesn't create any risks? How are you opening yourself to Jesus' power to grow the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22) in your life, making it better both now and for all eternity?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, “I keep your word close, in my heart, so that I won’t sin against you” (Psalms 119:11). Help me commit myself to this spiritual practice, and like you to build my life squarely on the principles of your word. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Think of the many times you come in contact with water each day (e.g. washing your hands, brushing your teeth, bathing, cooking, drinking, cleaning dishes, etc.). Choose one day when each family member keeps track of how he or she uses water. Share lists with one another. Invite everyone to remember his or her baptism each time he or she uses water. (If someone has not been baptized, ask him or her to remember the baptism of Jesus or of someone else in your family.) Each time you use water, imagine it as God’s grace cleansing you, pouring over you, and warming you. Thank God for the divine love poured out for each of you in Jesus Christ.