

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Today's Gospel happens after Jesus was baptized. Matthew says, "*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*" Mark says it happened "*immediately*" (Mark 1:12), but John the Baptist at least had the opportunity to identify Jesus as "*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29), as we heard back in January.

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry of reconciliation. That's how St. Paul talked about Jesus' work of salvation: "*in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them*" (2 Cor. 5:19). And He could do it "*for our sake*" because, as we heard on Ash Wednesday, God "*made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus knew no sin. His baptism was part of that as He told John, who wanted Jesus to baptize him: "*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*" (Matt. 3:15). And we've heard from Jesus Himself that He came not "*to abolish the Law or the Prophets ... but to fulfill them*" (Matt. 5:17).

Of course, Jesus had already been fulfilling the law and the prophets. He was circumcised on the eighth day according to the Scripture (Luke 2:21). He was presented at the temple on the fortieth day according to "*the Law of the Lord*" (Luke 2:22-24, 39). He grew up honoring Joseph and His mother Mary (Luke 2:51). He faithfully kept the festivals according to the Scripture (Luke 2:41). But Jesus was mostly passive in this law keeping. His parents saw to it that the law was kept.

But now, at His baptism and following, Jesus began His ministry of reconciling the world to Himself, and that meant fulfilling "*all righteousness*" on our behalf. That meant "*in every respect [being] tempted as we are, yet [remaining] without sin*" (Heb. 4:15). Thus Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The two are connected: baptism and temptation. In our own baptisms, we are "sundered from the number of the unbelieving, preserved dry and secure in the holy ark of Christendom." Thus we confess as we pray Luther's flood prayer. And, at the same time, Luther reminds us, we are burdened with "a mighty and lifelong enemy," the devil (*Luther's Works*, 53:102). He's our adversary; he "*prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking ... to devour*" us (1 Pet. 5:8). Therefore, trial, tribulation, temptation are all things we should expect. The tempter pressed Jesus hard; we shouldn't expect less.

So it is that Jesus takes on the old, evil foe, in our Gospel, a mighty foe who caused the downfall of the first Adam. And all this is what the first Adam's defeat

wrought on us: because the first Adam sinned, sin infected the world, and we all are born with sin; because of the first Adam's disobedience, we were all made sinners; because the first Adam sinned, death came into the world and now plagues it; because of the first Adam's trespass, condemnation became man's lot, not just temporal death but eternal death. We confess it: we have "justly deserved [God's] temporal and eternal punishment" (LSB, p. 184).

But Jesus entered the world as the Second Adam and became our champion, for Jesus, true man, took on our flesh "*being born of woman,*" and He placed Himself "*under the law, to redeem [us] who [are] under the law*" (Gal. 4:4-5). The Second Adam could answer the call because although He was by nature God, He did not consider "*equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*" (Phil. 2:6-7). It was in this human form, "*made like [us] in every respect*" (Heb. 2:17) in weakness that the Second Adam met that serpent of old. Guileless, He stood against the schemes of the devil. Shieldless, He took on all of the devil's flaming darts upon His own body (Eph. 6:11, 16).

The devil began his assault with a temptation toward Jesus' flesh. Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights, and He was hungry. So the devil used that hunger to tempt Jesus — "*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*" We might think, "what's wrong with that?"

But that's just how sin entered into the world. The first Adam with his wife were concerned about themselves—that they might have knowledge even of good and evil, that they might be like God— and so they ate of the fruit. The second Adam, Jesus, on the other hand, came not to serve Himself, or to be served by others. He came to serve (Matt. 20:28). Falling prey to the self-centeredness prompted by the devil would distract Him from that singular purpose. It would display a lack of trust in the Father's loving care. Therefore, selflessly, the second Adam rebuffs Satan, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

The devil was just getting started. He attacked that trust further, trying to create doubt, even in Jesus. "*Did God actually say?*" It had worked with the first Adam in the garden. "*You will not surely die.*" The words slithered off the serpent's forked tongue. Similarly here in the wilderness the devil twisted God's word to suggest that the Father might not keep His word. "Didn't God say that He would command His angels to bear you up? You need to be sure. Throw Yourself down to see if Your Father keeps His promises."

But doubt did not rise up in the second Adam. He rebuffed the ancient foe, using His faithful Father's word: "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*" This test that the devil set before Jesus was not about assurance but doubt, and

putting God to the test is not faith but unbelief. Jesus did not succumb to the temptation to doubt, though the temptations continued all the way to the cross. Even in His suffering, Jesus “*continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly*” (1 Pet. 2:23).

Indeed, there IS nothing more sure than God’s word and the faithful God who spoke it. Not even things we’ve seen or experienced are more sure. We heard Peter say so last week. More sure than seeing Jesus transfigured before his eyes was “*the prophetic word more fully confirmed*” (1 Pet. 1:19). Everything else may turn to corruption. The grass may wither and flowers fade, but God’s word is sure. It endures forever (Isa. 40:6-8).

The devil tried yet again, this time using the flesh’s yearning for the easy way. “You don’t need to go to the cross, Jesus. *I will give [it all to] you, if you will fall down and worship me.*” The second Adam had had enough. He dismissed Satan with a “*Be gone,*” and another word from God: “*You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.*”

Dear friends in Christ, “*Temptations to sin are sure to come*” unto us (Luke 17:1). Part of what it means to be fallen man is to feel the devil’s urge to sin. And in our weak flesh, we so often succumb. But thanks be to God for the second Adam, who did not fall prey to the devil’s wiles, who fulfilled all righteousness for us, and who, sinless but bearing our sins, sacrificed Himself on the cross to ransom you from Satan — you have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb of God — and to deliver you “*from the domain of darkness and [transfer you] to the kingdom of [the] beloved Son*” (Col. 1:13).

And thanks be to God, who by His grace — in Holy Baptism, by His Word, by His Holy Supper — forgives our sins, saves us through faith, and puts us on a new path — no longer “*following the course of this world,*” no longer “*following the prince of the power of the air,*” no longer living “*in the passions of our flesh*” (Eph. 2:2-3), but following Christ, following the path lighted by His word (Ps. 119:105), walking in the good works God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10).

O saints, the path we follow can be difficult, as Jesus’ path was difficult, but at its end is life. We still wrestle “*against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*” (Eph. 6:12). God grant us strength . . . strength in Christ, strength in His might. Gird us, O Lord, with Your armor (Eph. 6:14-18), that we may stand firm in faith to the end, that His victory may be realized in us, that His angels may come for us, comfort us, and finally carry us to His side to await our resurrection. God grant it for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.