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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
First Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2010
Text: Luke 4:1–13

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The season of Lent is a remarkable time in the life of the Church. This season teaches us how Christians live out their lives of faith in this fallen world. As Christians, we live day by day in the power of the Holy Spirit while being guided by God's holy Word. Today's Gospel reading from Luke 4:1–13 marvelously illustrates this basic pattern of Christian discipleship.

Jesus, God's beloved Son, is guided into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit – don't miss that point made in vs. 1 – to do God the Father's will. And when tempted not to do the Father's will, Jesus consistently and exclusively relies upon the Holy Scriptures, God's inspired Word.

It all began, according to vs. 1, when Jesus "returned from the Jordan." The reference to the Jordan is a verbal clue linking these events with Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. As you may know, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove and the Father from heaven declares that Jesus is His beloved and well-pleasing Son. From that moment forward, Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Father's will to save the world. By the way, we Christians follow the same pattern: we are baptized in water in God's name, filled with Holy Spirit and then live in faith and fellowship with God.

The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to endure the temptations of the devil. Such an observation leads one to ask why? Why must Jesus do this? Luke provides the verbal clue needed to answer the question, 40 days in the wilderness.

In the Old Testament, there was another famous wilderness wandering. Through God's mighty hand of power, Israel was released from Egyptian bondage. The Lord led the newly freed nation through the wilderness by a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. He miraculously filled their hungry stomach and quenched their thirsting throats. And an enduring promise was given to Israel – I am the God of your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I will be your God and you will be my people. But the devil was also active in the wilderness, inciting Israel to rebellion time and time again with one temptation after another.

As a result of Israel's rebellion against God, they wandered in the desert for forty years. During that time, Israel didn't have a very good track record with temptation. At every

crucial point Israel failed to trust and believe God's promises. The people of Israel hardened their hearts to the voice of God. Numbers 14:22 states that the Israelites tested the Lord ten times. Each time was a failure. Those dismal years of wilderness wandering are the miserable saga of failure and defeat when it comes to trusting the Lord and fighting against temptation.

Jesus, on the other hand, is led by God's Spirit into a wilderness wandering to face the devil's temptations for 40 days, 1 day for each year of Israel's wanderings. Jesus is Israel reduced to one person. Jesus represents God's people and even the world as the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to do what Israel failed to do. He will "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Throughout the 40 days of fasting and temptation, Jesus will defeat the devil and drive him away. As humanity's substitute, Jesus goes into the wilderness to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Jesus does battle with the Satan on behalf of His people, for you and me. He endured temptation as our Substitute. Just as He suffered underneath the burden of our sin on the cross so He endured the temptations that we constantly face. This He did in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the wilderness, Israel had grumbled about the lack of food. Jesus, on the other hand, willingly fasts for 40 days. He willingly refrains from food in order to live solely by faith, prayer, and the God's Word. That's the point in fasting, to remind your body that it lives under God's grace and goodness always.

After that time of fasting, Satan comes to the Lord with what had to be a very appealing invitation: "If you are the Son of God command this stone to become bread" (vs. 3). Jesus is starving. It's been 40 days of desert wandering with no food. All that He has to do is say the word and rocks will become bread! What harm could there be in that? After all, God miraculously provided manna for the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings. Should He not also provide food for His beloved Son?

Jesus came to be our Servant. He will not use His divine power to serve Himself. He will wait as we must wait on the Father to open His hand and give Him daily bread. So Jesus throws Scripture into the teeth of Satan, Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone'" (vs. 4). And here, for the first time, we see Jesus using God's Word to defend Himself against the Devil's temptation. Listen and learn well, dear saints of God.

Satan, next he tries to capture Jesus with a temptation for worldly glory and power. Satan takes Jesus and shows him all the world's kingdoms. He says to Jesus, "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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours" (vs. 6-7). The Devil is

tempting Jesus to bypass the pain and suffering of the cross, the chosen means of the heavenly Father to establish Jesus' divine kingdom. Jesus renounces Satan and all of his works and all of his ways. Again, Jesus turns to the Scriptures for protection. Quoting Deuteronomy 6:13 Jesus says, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve" (vs. 8).

One more temptation from the Satan's quiver is hurled at Jesus. Taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple, Satan says, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'" (vs. 10–11).

Satan is a skilful tempter. Jesus has quoted the Scriptures twice. Well, two can play at that game. The Devil can quote God's Word too, Psalm 91:11–12 specifically. And what is the Devil trying to accomplish? To keep Jesus from the cross. Just jump down from the Temple. God's Word does say the angels will protect you. Think of the devotion, fame and glory you'll receive Jesus. No suffering, no blood and sweat; only glory and honor. And it's all based on the Bible!

Again Jesus answers with God's Word. Deuteronomy 6:16, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (vs. 12). Psalm 91 is about trusting God not testing Him. Jesus is our Savior not our showman and the Bible is the story of redemption not a book of useful quotations that will justify whatever we want to do.

Saints of God, we are not strong enough to withstand Satan's temptations. We don't have the power to do battle with the old evil foe. Jesus went to the wilderness to endure your temptation. Do not think you can stand in your own power and strength. You stand in the strength and victory of Christ alone. His victory over the devil's temptations is your victory over daily temptations. Christ's death is your death. His resurrection is your resurrection. When faced with Satan's temptations, you can confidently say, "I am baptized into Jesus and filled with His Holy Spirit. Depart from me, you wily foe. God's Word tells me that my Lord Jesus has defeated you. He is my God and your conqueror!"

Through Jesus, you can live in the power of the Spirit and walk in the victorious path of the Holy Scripture. It will not mean the end of temptation for you. That is the daily reality of all Christians in this world. But you are not left to yourselves. In your hearts and minds is the life-giving Word of God. God's Word and Spirit were Jesus' conquering weapons. They are yours as well.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.