



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

Sunday, February 17th, 2013 Lent I

*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil*

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. AMEN** ✠

Today's Gospel lesson is St. Matthew's account of the temptation of Jesus. Jesus has just been baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. "...the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Here is the beginning of God's new kingdom, foretold by the prophets of Israel, and announced to the Gentile wise men. The hopes and expectations of countless years all came to a focus in this Jesus of Nazareth.

This was a glorious expression of the unique person of this man. But what precisely was his purpose here on earth and what was the nature of his new kingdom? That was yet to be made clear.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." And there in the wilderness an

explanation comes. Generally, the things of darkness are obscure and confused, muddled and indefinite; they like to be presented in shades of gray. Here, in the wilderness, there is no distraction, no hiding, no trying to blend in. It is a case of either/or, light or dark. The choice is plain.

First, the Christ is tempted to turn stones into bread. The devil wants Jesus to turn the divine power toward worldly ends, to satisfy the demands of the senses. There is nothing wrong with being hungry and wanting to eat, but the temptation lies in seeing such satisfactions as the purpose of his vocation and the point of God's kingdom. But the Kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking; making ourselves more comfortable, by using God to satisfy our desires. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The second temptation is to test the divine power: “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down.” It is the temptation to control and manipulate the divine spirit, according to one’s own terms. But God’s Kingdom and its miracles have nothing to do with using God for human purposes. “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

The third temptation is indeed the root of all others. It is the ancient satanic temptation of Adam and Eve: “to be as gods.” It is the temptation to see one’s finite self in the place of God, to be oneself the measure of everything. That, in truth, is to worship the devil. “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” This is the ultimate illusion of futile pride and arrogance, because it is untrue to the absolute reality of God, and his order of creation. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” “Then the devil leaveth him.” The illusions have been revealed as what they are. They are the temptation to use God for worldly ends, and the temptation to regard one’s human self as God. Clearly that is absurd, but human beings have a great capacity for ignorance and self-deception.

“And behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” With temptation confronted, recognized in its negativity and dismissed, Jesus is free in his vocation, his mission of pure love to mankind. Perspective being clarified, the angels, the messengers of God serve him as he obeys the Father’s will.

The temptations of Christ represent the basic forms of all temptations; they are our individual temptations, and the temptations of the Church. They are the

illusions that we can use the divine spirit for worldly ends, and that we can use God to justify our whims and self centered wishes, that we can be as absolute as God.

In this season of Lent, let us be led by the Spirit into our wilderness where we be made free from our illusions. For this a certain distancing from the noise and busyness of the world is necessary.

As adopted children of God through our belief in the only begotten son, Jesus Christ, we are called by love to accompany him to the wilderness, to learn his obedience and to rejoice in the company of heaven.

We must experience the reality of the presence of Him who is beyond all words, thoughts, or feelings so that we may know that presence in our words, thoughts, and feelings; and so that we may share that presence in the world.

*Let your light so shine before men, that they see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

**✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son  
and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN ✠**