

Matthew 4:1-11

First Sunday in Lent, A.D. 2026

Hope Lutheran Church of Idaho Falls, Idaho

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In the name of Jesus. Amen.

All too often we find ourselves in a wilderness, where refreshment is scarce, and the temperature of emotions and pain are high, when we are tempted to anxiety, rage, envy, hatred, or despair. Temptations to disobey God's holy commandments, and all too often we have fallen into disobedience. When we disobey the Commandments of divine love, called the Ten Commandments, and we KNOW it, even a lush garden seems like a frightful wilderness to us, just as our original parents, Adam and Eve, experienced as a result of their disobedience to the God of love. It is TYPICAL in times of temptation and times of trial and failing to succeed in the test to love truly, that those in temptation will BLAME others for one's own fault, one's own grievous fault. Adam blamed God for creating and giving a dear and cherished wife to him, and he blamed Eve, his wife, for his transgression. The Israelites in a time of thirst and hunger in the wilderness blamed God for rescuing them out of Egyptian slavery and they blamed Moses for leading them OUT of Egypt, forgetting the fact that they were miserable in slavery and that God protected them and brought them through the Red Sea on a path of

dry ground through the midst of the sea and thereafter drowned their Egyptian enemies in the sea. Temptation, sin, test, failure, BLAME LAYING onto someone else, like a scapegoat, for one's own sin. Who will fight for us in the wilderness of temptation that is so designed to defeat us and WIN against it all and succeed in every test?

Christ Jesus KNOWS the heat and pain of temptations most severe. In today's reading in the Gospel of Matthew, we see our Lord Jesus Christ preyed upon by the grandmaster of temptation, the devil. How did the Lord Jesus end up in that wilderness in the first place?

A man of the tribe of Levi, John the Baptist, saw Jesus coming toward him at the Jordan River to be baptized by John.

⁴ John would have prevented [Jesus], saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

And THEN it says,

Then Jesus was led up by the [Holy] Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

It is written in the book of Leviticus, chapter 16, it speaks of a scapegoat offering.

It says,

⁶ “[The high priest, of the tribe of Levi] ...

²¹ ... shall lay both his hands on the head of [a] live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. ²² The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness....

³⁴ This shall be an everlasting statute for you (Leviticus 16:6-8, 20-22, 34a).

And there in the wilderness the innocent scapegoat under the severe sun was eventually preyed upon by the wild beasts.

John the Baptist was the priestly prophet who laid his hands upon Jesus, and baptized Him, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, and John then declared in awe of Jesus, “Behold, the lamb of GOD, who takes away the sin of the WORLD.”

The evangelist MARK, in HIS Gospel, points out that after Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and there in the wilderness Jesus was "with the wild beasts," just like the scapegoat, bearing the sins of all the people.

Like the four-legged scapegoat's innocent ears hearing an incomprehensible chaos of sinner's words declaring the sins of the people of Israel and bearing those sins on itself while not having participated in ANY of them, so the innocent Son of God and OUR Savior, who knows NO sin, He subsumes in Himself EVERYONE, from Adam and his transgression, to YOU and everyone that is YET to be conceived, and Jesus subsumes and takes on the temptations that each and every one of US and of ALL of mankind suffer, AND the Holy Spirit then DRIVES Jesus into the uninhabited wilderness among the wild beasts, NOT as a prey to those wild beasts, but as a prey to the DEVIL who prowls around and preys on US.

Let us NOT think that because Jesus was, and IS, God in the flesh, that His temptations were therefore less severe than OURS, because, after all, the Lord Jesus IS God and has all power. But we are NOT THINKING clearly of the temptations that Jesus faced in our place when we think in that way. The truth is, that PRECISELY because Jesus IS God in the flesh, the temptations that the devil

hurled at HIM were of a severity that NO ONE BUT the Lord Jesus has ever suffered, because the evil one targeted JESUS with the intent that if he could take JESUS down, he would take the whole human race down with Him. But UNLIKE US, Jesus, the innocent scapegoat, the holy lamb of God, the valiant One, who was tempted by the devil, He overcame ALL of the temptations that we so often fall prey to and are defeated BY. CHRIST JESUS is the one who fights the devil for us and has defeated Him for us.

Everything that the Lord Jesus does, and everything that is done TO the Lord Jesus Christ, is for our salvation, including the temptations that Jesus suffered, so that HIS perfect obedience is accounted to US purely by the grace of God, who loves us SO much that He gave His only begotten Son in rescue of us. You have received Jesus' perfect obedience in holy baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. See your sins and the sins of everyone on Christ Jesus, the true and innocent scapegoat and holy lamb of God, put to death in His death on the cross.

We have ONE, whom God, the Father Himself has elected, who bore our sin and is our Savior, and this Savior is God's one and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who sympathizes with us in all of our weaknesses, and who in EVERY RESPECT has been tempted as WE are tempted, yet is without sin, and He helps us through the

wilderness of temptations, and He is able to help us and He is always present TO help us because He is alive from the dead and lives forever as our exalted Savior always present. IN all things through which we walk, let us with confidence draw near to Him, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Let us draw near to the throne of grace at His holy altar, to receive His word of forgiveness, and His body and blood, and therein receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Amen.