

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**First Sunday after Epiphany, January 7, 2018**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 457, 144:1-3, 372, 402, 410.

Lessons: Proverbs 1:10-19, Ephesians 6:10-18, Matthew 3:1-12.

Sermon Text: Luke 4:1-13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our Gospel lesson you heard about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. *“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”* Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV)

These words make it clear, once again, that Jesus is truly God. But then follows our sermon text in which we realize that

**JESUS CHRIST, TRUE MAN, WAS TEMPTED JUST AS WE ARE**

- 1. Let’s look at the temptations, and**
- 2. The tool to fight temptations.**

We read in the letter to the Hebrew Christians: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”* Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)

When we accept the fact that Jesus is also true man, we realize that every temptation facing us is one that Jesus faced – and overcame, because although he was repeatedly tempted to sin during his life on earth, he still was without sin.

We sometimes face the danger of thinking of our sermon text as the only time that Jesus was tempted. It is not. But Scripture records these three special, serious, desperate temptations of Satan for our learning. We see first of all what these temptations are and then how Jesus responded to them.

What is the chief tool and weapon he used in fighting against the devil? I will reserve my answer until you have had time to realize that answer from Scripture.

We read that *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”*

Matthew tells us specifically that *“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.”* Matthew 4:1 (NIV) These words, like all of Holy Scripture, were written for our learning.

We read that *“He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.”* We, too, would be hungry if we fasted for 40 days. Fasting is often mentioned in Scripture and even for a short time is one way of concentrating on a task before you. I want to emphasize that going without food for that long would make one weak. And when is the best time for an enemy to attack? When you are weak.

How often don’t we make ourselves weak in the daily struggle against the devil! We ignore the weapons God has placed at our disposal. In our Epistle lesson you heard about the weapons, both defensive and offensive, that God places at our disposal: Truth, the righteousness of God, the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and perhaps most importantly, *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”* Ephesians 6:17 (NIV) And, of course, prayer, continually talking to God and asking him to help keep us

safe! Scripture records a number of times when Jesus fasted, and his fasting was accompanied by prayer, fervent prayer!

It has been said that an army travels on its stomach. What are you eating to prepare you for your fights against the devil? Are we gobbling up the mere snacks and junk food of the words of the world or are we devouring the Word of God to prepare and protect us in this eternal life-or-death struggle?

Well, because Jesus was weakened through hunger, we read that ***“The devil said to him, ‘if you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’”*** That would have been a simple task for Jesus. After all, didn’t he miraculously feed thousands of people later in his life on earth with just a few dried fish and small loaves of bread? Change a stone into bread! A simple task! But ***“Jesus answered, It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’”*** This is Jesus’ final answer when it came to feeding his body. We must realize that not only our body needs to be fed. But isn’t it so easy to think of earthly things – including the food we eat – to be so very important? Yes, God tells us that we must make a living. After the fall into sin, God told Adam ***“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*** Genesis 3:19 (NIV) But doesn’t that simple matter of “making a living” sometimes turn into placing the “living” we want ahead of God’s Word in our lives?

So there is the first part of Jesus’ answer to fighting temptations.

Then ***“The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.’”***

If we think of a literal place to see ***“in an instant all the kingdoms of the world”*** we would realize that there is no such physical place. But Satan does have power to deceive and trick. But the most important thing we must realize is that this is just plain a lie! The devil did not speak to Eve with truth in the Garden of Eden and he is still and always a liar. Even if he tells part of the truth we must always remember that even a half-truth is really a lie. Jesus plainly tells us that the devil ***“was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*** John 8:44 (NIV) We must realize that every lie is from the father of lies, no matter who tells it. The devil was asking the very Son of God to worship him.

In the same way, Satan boldly and bluntly confronts us. We may be shocked and unable to answer or even think when some temptations confront us.

Satan is repeatedly and continually placing lies in front of us. When it comes to common sins today the additional temptation – a lie – is ‘everyone is doing it.’ When it comes to the lies of Satan, they are always presented as totally and completely factual. For example, how often do you see or hear, as just one example, that the moon is 4.51 billion years old and that the earth is just about as old? Not just “may be”, but is! And how many lies haven’t we heard from many of those who are leading our country? In political campaigns we often hear abundant lack and disregard for the eighth commandment. “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.” When it comes to obedience to God’s commandments, we see even the highest officials in our nation trashing the commandments and setting terrible examples for us to follow. Those kinds of things are truly causing offense in the scriptural sense. We might then think ‘If they can say those kinds of things, I can say and write and repeat those kinds of things.’ We must be careful that our words reflect our confession as followers of Jesus Christ. When we cannot follow the examples of those in any position of authority, we must set an example with what we say and write! Even repeating what others say or write that does not “speak well of” someone does nothing but tear down or mock. And that is not the calling of the Christian.

Because Satan is constantly setting lies before us, we must ***“pray continually.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV) Our life must be a constant one of prayer, speaking to God, asking him for help and comfort and looking for his answers in his Holy Word.

To this temptation and lie of Satan Jesus boldly and bluntly answered Satan: ***“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”*** God is the only one we must worship. We must reserve our praise and glory for God, and not fall into the trap of worshiping anyone or anything else! Remember that there are many

“things” and people who are vying for our unreserved attention. And sadly, we invite many of the evil, wicked things and ideas into our very homes! I’m thinking of the things the world calls “entertainment” and even “news”. Satan is trying in every way possible to take over our actions, our words and our very thoughts!

Twice so far Satan boldly tried to seduce Jesus. But these didn’t work on the Son of God.

Then ***“The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down from here. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus answered, ‘It says: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.””***

You see that Satan knows the scriptures. But he is not going to use them for our good. He is going to misuse them, to twist them, to lie about them to trick us into doubt, false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins. We believe in God and we believe that God’s Word has been inspired by him for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. James tells us ***“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.”*** James 2:19 (NIV)

So did you notice how Jesus responded to temptations? What was his chief weapon to fight the devil? He responded with the Word of God.

I love the way Matthew records Jesus’ answers. Three times Jesus said ***“It is written!”*** What a beautiful response. Not “Well, I think that I shouldn’t.” Not just “I don’t want to.” Jesus’ answers show us how to respond to temptations with something greater than ourselves. We must put the source of the answer and the responsibility somewhere other than on us. ***“It is written.”*** And if such an answer isn’t adequate in your mind, we could say ***“It is written in the Word of God.”*** Sure, we will be mocked and made fun of but isn’t that happening now? Attacks on Bible-believing Christians are coming from every direction and more frequently and more boldly! But the simple answer ***“It is written”*** was good enough for Jesus and it should be good enough for us.

So look carefully at how Jesus responded to these major, these big, these bold attacks from Satan. He used the Word of God. He, of course, knew all the scriptures. And he gave us all the written scriptures to learn from them and to use them. We must constantly search the scriptures to grow in God’s grace.

***“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.”*** Satan’s approach was ‘if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.’ On your way home think and talk about some of the times Satan tempted you. He tempts us all the time, but especially when we are weak. He tempts us especially when we think we need something or even just ‘want’ something. He tempts us by making us think we need to put God to the test, maybe when we are upset about something, or think we can do it all by ourselves. Sure, it is true that God tells us ***“He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”***

God rescues us. But he doesn’t want us to put ourselves in danger, especially spiritual danger. There is enough evil in the world to tempt us without intentionally going into danger. Remember, Satan is looking for opportune times – good times – the right time and circumstance to tempt us, too.

He’s ready to pounce on us like a hungry lion. ***“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*** 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

Remember Jesus’ answers to temptation:

***“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”***

***“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”***

***“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”***

Please, God, continue to deliver us from evil! Amen.