



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: The Temptation of Jesus

Talking to the Kids

Jesus experienced life just like all of us. He was tempted to do things that would not make God happy. But each time Jesus was tempted, Jesus knew how to resist.

In our lives, we are going to face temptations to do things that will not make God happy. And we will not always know how to resist.

Our job is not to always have the right answer, resist every temptation, live life perfectly without sin. Our job is to trust Jesus.

Jesus forgives when we get things wrong. Jesus sets us on the path to try again the next time. And once we are claimed as God's children in Baptism, we will never be cut off from God, because of Jesus.

Week 1: Matthew chapters 3 and 4

- The temptations of Jesus takes place in the wilderness immediately after Jesus is baptized. Having just heard the voice of God as he came up out of the water, this story now has the Word of God at the heart of this dialogue between Jesus and the devil/Satan. And there are a lot of layers going on here.
- One of our struggles with this text is the identity of Satan/the devil. Satan in Hebrew is simply "The Accuser". We find Satan in the Old Testament book of Job as a member of God's holy court. The identity of Satan as a fallen angel comes about during the intertestamental period with the increase of apocalyptic writings and a growing sense of dualism. Dualism is the notion that there is an all-powerful good deity (God) battling against an all-powerful bad/evil deity (Satan is generally named here) in a spiritual battle playing out on the terrestrial plane. We are the pawns in this battle in the notion of dualism. So often we read the story of Satan still with this in mind, thinking that somehow Satan could actually win this temptation moment against Jesus, just as Satan somehow wins tempting us people into doing evil things all the time. But the author of Matthew's Gospel may not have been writing this story as a news report of an actual encounter between Jesus, representing God and all this is good, and Satan, representing all that is bad.
- In Matthew's day, there was a rabbinic tradition of theological battles where two rabbis would dual against each other with scripture -- well here it says (x) and the response is, yeah, well here it says (y), and the scripture of highest import wins the battle. Matthew may be using literary characters of Jesus and Satan to represent this rabbinic tradition, demonstrating battles happening within his own community as he was writing this ... people would have been dealing with hunger, power-trips with demonstrating God's holy power, or seeking political control.
- We can place ourselves into this theological construct today. How does our modern Christian nationalism movement wrestle for control over how people live their lives, seek medical care, live in romantic relationships, choose political leaders? How does God's kingdom, still represented by Jesus, resist that modern movement at every turn?
- Our modern view of cosmology may not allow for dualism or the need for a fallen angel named "Satan." Yet those influences still hang over our reading of the temptations of Jesus. But if we just read this passage as a spiritual battle between two divine entities, we do a disservice to ourselves and the world around us. The real world is living this battle every day, and we are called to own our own shortcomings and grow into the fullness of God's kingdom values as followers of Jesus.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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