



February 22, 2026 Sermon

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“Temptation”

Transcript

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Those are the verses immediately before our Gospel reading today. The Spirit descending like a dove, alighting on Jesus, and the voice from heaven claiming Jesus as God's beloved Son. And the very next verse, the start to our lesson today goes like this. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Thanks, Spirit. When I read the story of Jesus's baptism by itself, I always pictured the dove descending from heaven as this serene bird floating down gently like on a sunbeam escalator until it rests gently, tenderly on Jesus. And that may have been the case. But when you keep reading, the very next thing that happens is that same spirit leads Jesus directly into the middle of nowhere to be challenged by the devil, to be fasting and famished for 40 days, 40 nights in the wilderness like his own miniature version of the Israelites' pre-Promised Land. And after that, I instead have a picture of the spirit descending more like a giant eagle in a hunting dive, plucking Jesus out of the water and unceremoniously dumping him into the desert with no company except for the grumblings of his empty stomach. What the heck, spirit? The very last thing Jesus hears, the very last thing we hear before Jesus's relocation by the Spirit, is that voice from heaven. This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased. And the first thing the devil says to Jesus is, If you are the Son of God, Jesus is famished, alone, I'm assuming, tired. It's been 40 days and 40 nights. The Spirit has gone from gently alighting to abrupt relocation. And the devil says, If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. And

again, from the temple top, he says, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down and the angels will catch you. The devil, Satan, the tempter, is implying that Jesus isn't the Son of God. He's challenging the freshly declared identity from Jesus's baptism. But if you are God's Son, that should come with certain Privileges, right? Advantages, power. If you're hungry after God's Spirit led you all the way out here, then make yourself some food. Command these stones. You have the power, the ability, if you are God's Son. You know, I'm wondering if you really are God's son, chances are that others are wondering too. So why not jump from the temple in the middle of the holy city where everyone can see? You quoted scripture, right? One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Well, I'll quote scripture too. God will command the angels concerning you. They'll catch you. You won't even stub your toe on a stone. Show all of God's people, show the world who you really are, if you are the Son of God. Don't test God, you say. Well, God seems to be testing you. Let me show you the kingdoms of the world. They'll be yours if you are the Son of God. They should be yours anyway, right? But here you are with me. Worship me, and these will all be yours, no questions asked. You deserve this if you are the Son of God. You deserve this. I think that's the underlying current to all three of the devil's temptations. You deserve this. Take it. You're God's son. Command it and it will happen. Why be obedient to God when you have the power just to do that, just to do it? Make those angels catch you. You are entitled to all the kingdoms. The devil takes what is good, God declaring Jesus as the beloved Son, and twists it, warps it, turns it from something good, something gifted, into something selfish, something horrid. And the devil hasn't stopped. He just uses the same tactics on God's children instead of Jesus. We might think of the devil as a silly cartoon or a flimsy Halloween costume, red tights and ponytail, a villain beard. But as one commentator puts it, we know firsthand about the sin that caused, causes, and will cause suffering to us, our loved ones, our neighbors, our global communities and creations itself. Sin is real. Evil is real. Indeed, the devil is real. This oppressive, tangible reality is as real as the air we breathe, felt but not always seen. Greed, envy, rage, hatred, war, discrimination, and apathy are just some of the ways the devil's forces wreak havoc upon us. These forces have one goal and one goal only, to turn us away from the will of God. The choices and the sins are ours alone. But the devil is an old-school influencer. The devil challenges us to, tempts us to. The devil offers us food when we're famished, recognition when we're lonely, power when we feel overwhelmed by the world. The devil is out there, is in here. Finding the vulnerability and exploiting. You are a Christian. If you are God's beloved child, surely this isn't the life God wants for you. Why would the Spirit put you in this position? Hmm, you deserve better. You are better. You are entitled to a better life. A better life than those other sinners, those folks that don't agree with you, those folks that don't worship like you, those folks that don't look like you, those folks that are more sinful than you. Let me pull a few select Bible verses to prove my point. I really

wonder why God isn't fixing your problems. Why don't you command these stones if you are a child of God? Why be obedient to God if you have the power to do it yourself? Christians follow Christ. We walk in the footsteps of Jesus, following his example. Jesus emptied himself, died for us, did not exalt himself. And yet, throughout history, generation after generation, and still today, there are plenty of Christians teaching and living as though we are more deserving, more entitled than anyone else. Sometimes it's in obvious ways, with TV shows and book deals and false gospels of prosperity, or crying victim from the seat of privilege. But nowhere in Scripture are we promised that by following Christ, we'll have it better than anyone else. Actually, it's quite the opposite. That's what Paul is getting at in the reading from Romans. Paul is basically saying that Adam's original sin has to do with disobedience, with thinking that he knew better than God. The serpent said that by eating the fruit, Adam and Eve would be like God. The fruit was pleasing to look at and surely tasted good. Don't you deserve this? Paul says that through that act, Adam brought sin into the world and tainted humanity, leading to trespass and condemnation. But then, Paul says that through obedience, the righteousness, the selflessness of Jesus Christ, he undid the condemnation of Adam, and then some, with grace abounding for all. In Paul's comparison, after Adam, death and sin held dominion. After Jesus, those who received the free gift, the grace of God, exercised dominion through Jesus. The devil offers false dominion, telling us that we deserve it. So, to command and to take what we want. But exercising dominion through Jesus, that looks very different. The Temple told Jesus to command the stones to become loaves of bread. What does Jesus do with bread? He multiplies it to feed 5,000. He takes the bread, gives thanks for it, breaks it, and says, this is my body given for you. The devil told Jesus to test God and jump from the temple so the angels would catch him. Does Jesus test God? No. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays, may this cup pass from me, but your will not my will be done. The devil told Jesus to worship him in order to gain dominion over all the kingdoms of the earth. What does Jesus say about dominion over others? And every gospel, every parable, every teaching, Jesus says that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. We don't deserve anything. And yes, we are children of God. All that we have is grace. We aren't entitled to special treatment, but we are titled. We bear the title children of God. We bear the title Disciples of Jesus. We bear the title beloved. And so, we in turn give special treatment to the least of these, to those the world says are undeserving. We exercise dominion through Jesus Christ, not as a license to do whatever we want. but as a lens to look through, as an example to follow. After the devil's third attempt, Jesus says, Away with you, Satan, for it is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him. And then the devil departs and angels attend. May the Holy Spirit pick us up still dripping with baptism and take us where we need to be. And may we be ready to follow Christ in obedience and righteousness. In this season of Lent, let us discipline ourselves against temptation and false entitlement. Let us follow

the advice and prayer of St. Francis. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Away with you, Satan, and thank you, Spirit.