



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 1

February 21, 2021

From the Water to the Wilderness

Mark 1:9–15

⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*

¹⁰ *And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* ¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*

¹² *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* ¹³ *And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*

¹⁴ *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,* ¹⁵ *and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

In our Gospel today we hear of the Temptation of Our Lord. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this early episode that took place immediately after Jesus’ baptism. But, while Matthew and Luke take roughly a dozen verses to relate the account, Mark, in his typically succinct manor, covers it in just two. He writes: “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”

So, Jesus goes immediately from His baptism in the Jordan to His temptation in the wilderness. This is how it is for us, too. We, who’ve been joined to Jesus in Holy Baptism, are also tempted. There’s no escaping it. We, too, go immediately “From the Water to the Wilderness.”

But it’s Jesus who leads the way. He begins at the water, being baptized by John in the Jordan. He sees the heavens opening – literally, “being torn open” – but instead of fiery judgment coming down, it’s the Spirit of God descending in the form of a dove, coming in peace to empower Jesus for His mission. And a voice comes from heaven – the Father’s voice – declaring, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” There is therefore no doubt as to who is being baptized. This Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one, the deliverer sent from God. And more than that, this Jesus is “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds.” He’s the eternal divine Son, come in human flesh, loved by the Father and well-pleasing to Him for taking on this saving mission.

But immediately afterward, Jesus is sent out into the wilderness. Mark even says that the Spirit “drove” Him into the wilderness. The language is stark and jarring, almost violent. The Spirit *drives* Jesus into the dark and foreboding wilderness. He’s not going



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 1

February 21, 2021

for a walk in the park. It's a *wilderness* out there – a wild, savage place. In Scripture, the wilderness is always a risky place to be. Desolate, remote – a lonely place, a place of isolation – where a man will be exposed to danger, but also a place where God tests His servants, in this case, His own beloved Son. This will be a challenge for Jesus, an ordeal He must endure.

“And he was with the wild animals.” Mark is the only evangelist to mention this detail. The wilderness may be uninhabited by humans, but it is a place for wild animals to prowl about – the haunt of jackals, the home of wild beasts; the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent. This is their turf, and you go there at your own risk. But Jesus goes, obedient to His Father's will and the Spirit's driving. He's got work to do out there.

Jesus must endure and overcome the temptations of the devil. “And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.” Matthew and Luke give us the details of the individual temptations; Mark just sums them up: “being tempted by Satan.” Somebody had to do the job, some representative of the human race had to face down Satan and win. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, had blown it in the Garden. Jesus prevails in the wilderness. Israel was in the wilderness, too – not for forty days, but for forty years – and they blew it when they were tempted toward sin and unbelief, compromising their identity as God's people. Jesus doesn't blow it; He withstands the tempting and carries on with His mission. And all this lies within the mystery of Christ's unique person. He is God in the flesh – true God and true man in one person, really tempted, yet without sin. There had to be a man, a second Adam, a faithful Israel, who would stand the test and prevail against Satan. Jesus is it. And He does it in our place, for us, staying faithful where we so often fail.

Jesus is tempted by Satan, our text says. “Satan” is another name for the devil, the evil one, the tempter. So Satan will go after this new Adam, this new Israel, just like he went after the old ones. But this time he's met his match . . . and then some. For Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. These works include temptations to sin and unbelief and other great shame and vice; temptations to pride, hypocrisy and refined godlessness; temptations to tune out God and His Word – the temptations that we so often fall prey to and give in to. But Christ would have none of it. He stays on course, locked in and focused throughout the ordeal, and He comes out of the wilderness proclaiming the message He came to fulfill: “The the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” From the water to the wilderness and out again into ministry, Jesus is the true and faithful One, staring down the danger, overcoming Satan and his temptations, and bold enough to preach the message that got John the Baptist arrested and killed . . . and will do the same to Him.

Yes, make no mistake, the temptation in the wilderness is a mere warm-up for the way of the cross. Christ's faithfulness, tested in the wilderness, will continue all the way to the agony of Gethsemane and the cross itself at Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. For Jesus has work to do there, namely, to pay the price for all *our* unfaithfulness, the sin that



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 1

February 21, 2021

brings death – that’s what Jesus will take upon Himself at the cross. And that’s how He finally defeats Satan. He’ll trample the serpent underfoot, even as that serpent strikes His heel. Sin, Satan, death, and hell – all are defeated and destroyed by the Man who remains faithful from the water to the wilderness . . . and to the wood of the cross. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and to replace them with His own heavenly works: forgiveness, righteousness, resurrection, life victorious, life everlasting. Yes, here is your divine Champion, my friends! This is the Man you need with you to make it through the wilderness.

And make no mistake about this, either: You, too, are in the wilderness. As soon as you were baptized, you were set in the midst of a wilderness. This world is that wilderness, and Satan is on the prowl here, like a roaring lion, looking for whom he may devour, like a deadly serpent ready to strike. From the water to the wilderness – that’s how it goes for those who are baptized into Christ.

You know, Luther once said that when we baptize an infant, this is not some quaint and cute custom, this is serious business that will place that child in danger. He writes: “Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from this little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy.” Satan hates Christians. He’s our lifelong enemy, the Adversary, the old evil foe who now means deadly woe – and he’s aiming at you. You have a target on your back, beloved. It was placed there as soon as the sign of the cross was made on your forehead and upon your heart at your baptism. Satan will tempt you to whatever he can use to try to get you away from Jesus. He knows he can’t beat Jesus, so if he can just get you away from Him . . . Satan will tempt you to let God’s Word go in one ear and out the other. He’ll tempt you to think you have better things to do with your time, more fun things than going to church or doing daily devotions. Anything to get you away from Jesus. Because when you’re on your own, you become vulnerable.

And not only do we have Satan to contend with, this world is a wilderness, a wilderness in which we spend our forty or eighty, or maybe a hundred years. It’s a lonely and desolate place, a hostile environment for Christians. We’re surrounded by nothing that will reinforce our faith, only by wild beasts that threaten to rip our faith to shreds. Christians are made to feel isolated, alone, out of place. As we move through this life, we’re walking through a wilderness, for that’s what this world is.

This is why we need each other, beloved. The church is the great caravan, the company of travelers walking together along the way, caring for and supporting one another. We need to stick close to each other. But most of all, we need to stick close to Jesus. The devil can’t touch us with Jesus by our side. And Christ supplies us with all that we need to remain strong in Him. He fortifies us with His Word and Sacraments; these are our food and nourishment for the journey.

My friend, as soon as you were baptized, you went immediately from the water into the wilderness. Satan has been tempting you ever since. He has strong allies in the world.



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 1

February 21, 2021

I don't know if you've noticed, but this world is *not* on our side. We walk in danger all the way. But we are not alone. The valiant one, our Champion, Jesus Christ, is by our side as we walk through this wilderness. Therefore, we will not fear, but rather, we'll be bolstered in our faith, filled with courage and hope, as we walk from the water through the wilderness toward the glory of the world to come, walking with Jesus all the way. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen