

Pastor Kenneth Mars
Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY
Invocabit (First Sunday in Lent)
February 18, 2024
Text: Matthew 4:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, trustworthy and reliable in all its parts. Upon God's Word alone all faith, doctrine, pious works, and Church practice and customs, are to be established and evaluated. But did you know the inspired authors of the 66 Biblical books did not break their writings out into chapters and verses? It wasn't until the 13th century AD when Christians divided each book of the Bible into chapters. And it wasn't until the 16th century AD when the chapters were divided into verses!

Most of the time, the chapter and verse divisions are very helpful. Occasional they aren't. The division between Matthew 3 and 4 is one such example. It's not bad but it does obscure an important truth in today's reading from Matthew's gospel. Let me read to you Matthew 3:16–4:3. And I'll explain why this is critical.

^{3:16}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; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." ^{4:1}Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Two things need to be highlighted: the temporal and theological connections between Jesus' baptism and His desert fasting and temptation. The temporal

connection is established in Matthew 4:1 by the word “Then.” As soon as Jesus was baptized and the Father spoke from heaven, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Our Lord’s baptism initiated the spiritual battle in which Jesus would engage for the next three years of His earthly ministry, culminating in our Lord’s final and decisive victory on Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension.

Our Lord’s baptism is the point at which Jesus’ public ministry begins. The direct spiritual confrontation with the devil truly begins there. And it must be highlighted here too that our Lord confronts the devil after His baptism only through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is not a self-chosen path. Rather, it was given to Him by His Father through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “Christ did not wage this war for Himself. He battled as the Surety, the Mediator, the Substitute of the whole human race, for all men, for us who are gathered here” (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 160).

Make no mistake about this. The spiritual struggle against Satan, sin, and evil was given to you by the Father through the ministry of the Holy Spirit when you were baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ. Your Christian life is not a self-chosen path. God the Father Himself has called you to live in repentance, faith, and discipleship. On the eve of our Lord’s crucifixion, Jesus told the 12 apostles, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...” (John 15:16).

It is absolutely true that when you were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit you received the gift of eternal life. Your baptism also marks the day you publicly renounced the devil, his works, and all his ways. That spiritual struggle will continue throughout your life. We do not seek it. No, it will come as the Holy Spirit guides and directs you.¹ Knowing that we are surrounded by the rage of Satan and his fallen angels, the deceits of the world, and the sinful weaknesses of our sinful flesh, we are to seek at all times God’s grace in Christ through His inspired Word.

¹ Thank you, Martin Luther, for this insight.

And that leads us to the theological connection between Jesus' baptism and temptations. As the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the Jordan River, God the Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17). Did you notice Satan's first words of temptation spoken to Jesus were, "If you are the Son of God..." (4:3). God the Father just said to Jesus, "you are My Son." In one way or another, Satan's three temptations try to get Jesus to doubt who He is, to use His divine mission for selfish reasons, and to seek self-serving glory.

The devil is powerful and cunning, not very creative. These are the same kinds of temptations he threw at Adam and Eve in the Garden as well as the children of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai and during their wilderness wanderings. It's the same kind of thing he throws at us: doubt who you are as God's child, misuse your redeemed status for selfish gain, or to abandon our salvation in unbelief, idolatry, and despair. Even though God the Father has spoken that you are His child: redeemed, sanctified, forgiven, and heir of His eternal kingdom! That's who you are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But the devil would have us forget all that and seek another path without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, thus leading to idolatry. Nothing less than our eternal salvation is at stake in our Lord's baptism and desert temptations.

But Christ Jesus won! "...not for Himself, but for us. Everything that we had lost through the fall in paradise Christ had again regained for us in the wilderness" (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 161–162). Though Satan tempted Jesus with food, like Adam and Eve, though the devil misused God's Word to mislead Jesus, though the devil enticed our Lord to establish His kingdom without crucifixion and resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ stood firm in faithfulness and truth. The devil was defeated, Christ won!

"The important thing ... is that you learn to believe that Christ battled for you, in your place, for your freedom and salvation. Whoever knows and feels his sins, whoever knows that he has served the devil, that he was full of unbelief, contempt of God's Word, pride, vanity, lust, and love of the world

... let him merely look to his Savior. This Champion from the stem of David has held the field for us. This Lion from the tribe of Judah has conquered for us...Side with Christ; then you are victorious over sin and hell. Then Christ also divides the spoils of war with you—forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life, and salvation. (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 162).

Although we are victorious in Christ, we too face the temptations of the Devil. But know this, Christ our Lord and Master leads us by the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily battles against sin, temptations, and Satan. In each and every temptation, Jesus answered, ‘It is written.’ Satan tempted Him to false doctrine, and He answered, ‘It is written.’ Jesus believed what His Father said in the inspired, Holy Scriptures. Three times Jesus quotes God’s Word; three times the devil is defeated. God’s inspired Word is our weapon and our shield for it gives us Jesus, our Savior. “If you stay with the Word, you remain with Christ. If you remain with Christ, you remain in grace. Grace will lead you to eternal victory. Amen” (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 167).

Yes, it is true. You entered into spiritual battle through the guidance of the Holy Spirit when you were baptized and confessed faith in Jesus. But it is also true, that everything Jesus won in His baptism, His victory over the devil’s temptations, and most especially, His death and resurrection are given to you by Christ through the Spirit. As you leave this holy place today, you do so in the guidance of the Spirit. God’s Word defines who you are as man, woman, husband, wife, son, daughter, employee, citizen, and so forth. You are the baptized of the Lord. This truth – you belong to Jesus by the Spirit – may be assaulted by various demonic lies. No matter. You and I, together, live in Christ. His glory and victories remains.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.