

2026 02 22 WORSHIP AT HOME

Dear friends,

Once more we are in Lent – this year seemingly rushing past like the last one! Today we read about the Devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness as he is preparing to begin his ministry. Where will he put his faith – what will he trust – where do his deepest loyalties lie? Jesus showed that, faced with temptation, he could be trusted to do the right thing. A time when each of us may reflect on how we respond when we are tested – and on whom we can trust when facing life's challenges.

As always, I wish you every blessing – Margaret.

Call to worship: Let us come now before God, our consoler in distress.
Let us come now before God, our hiding place from troubles.
Let us come now before God, whose love surrounds us.
Let us rejoice in the Lord, our comforter and refuge.

When we get things wrong – when we feel lost and alone – when we are scared and hurting – and when we face the unknown, we place our trust in you, Lord, relying on your endless love. Amen

God our stronghold and deliverer, you are the only Lord, our God, and we trust only in you.
Jesus you were tempted in the wilderness, but you chose another way.
You were obedient to your Father.
You challenged the evil one and reign victoriously.
We bow before you today and sit at your feet, worshipping only you. Amen.

**The words to 'Forty days and forty nights' by George Hunt Smyttan [1822-1870] and adapted by
Jubilate Hymns Singing the Faith 236**

1 Forty days and forty nights you were fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights tempted and yet undefiled.

2 Burning heat throughout the day, bitter cold when light had fled;
prowling beasts around your way, stones your pillow, earth your bed.

3 Shall not we your trials share, learn your discipline of will;
and with you by fast and prayer wrestle with the powers of hell?

4 So if Satan, pressing hard, soul and body would destroy;
Christ who conquered, be our guard; give to us the victor's joy.

5 Watching, praying, struggling thus, victory shall be ours too;
angels minister to us, as they ministered to you.

6 Saviour, may we hear your voice; keep us constant at your side;
and with you we shall rejoice at the eternal Eastertide.

Prayer including the Lord's Prayer

Jesus Christ, our wonderful Lord and Saviour, who, when tempted in the desert, resisted – in the world but not of the world: we worship and adore you.

When tempted by bread, you chose the word of God.
When tempted to be spectacular, you chose humility.
When tempted by riches and power, you chose servanthood.
Lord Jesus Christ, we worship and adore you. Amen.

Lord, we are sorry when we are tempted by all the world has to offer us:

the temptation to be relevant and popular,
the temptation to be spectacular and successful,
the temptation for power and wealth and so many things.

We are sorry when we make the wrong decisions – we are sorry for the temptations that lead to addiction, corruption, and ultimately hurt other people. Forgive us, Lord.

We seek your wisdom and discernment to make better choices, to be rooted in you.

We thank you that, in our weaknesses, we can be made strong – and that it is in weakness, in the desert times of our lives, that amazing things can happen. Amen.

Though tempted and though we make bad choices, through the cross we are assured of healing and forgiveness. In our weakness we are made strong. We are forgiven and God gives us a blank canvas to start again - to create something beautiful. Amen.

We thank you, Lord, that it is never too late to turn around – never too late to start again.

Thank you for pulling us out of darkness into your marvellous light – and that, though we are tempted and get things wrong, by your grace we are healed and restored.

Thank you that we are precious to you – that we know whose we are – we belong to you.

Thank you for loving us unconditionally – that we don't have to prove anything.

And we thank you that when we are tempted by the offerings of this world, you are there to pick us up.

Wipe off the dust and set us back on the right path.

Thank you for the amazing love which you offer to each one of us. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 4: 1-11 – taken from The Holy Bible New Living Translation copyright 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust.

Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by the Devil. For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry. Then the Devil came and said to him: 'If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread.'

But Jesus told him: 'No! The Scriptures say:

"People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God."

Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said: 'If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say:

"He orders his angels to protect you. And they will hold you with their hands to keep you from striking your foot on a stone."

Jesus responded: 'The Scriptures also say: "Do not test the Lord your God."'"

Next the Devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. 'I will give it to you,' he said, 'if you will only kneel down and worship me.' 'Get out of here, Satan,' Jesus told him. 'For the Scriptures say: "You must worship the Lord your God; serve only him."' Then the Devil went away, and angels came and cared for Jesus.

Comment – taken from a piece by David Adam – Complete Common Worship Sermon

Illustrations Copyright 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011 David Adam.

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus goes into the wilderness. Whenever he had a challenge to face, he spent time alone with the Father. We all need times of stillness and quiet to discover who we are and what we aim to do.

There is a tension in Matthew 4:1 because Jesus is led by the Spirit to be tempted by the Devil. The same tension is in all our lives because every moment we can choose to serve God or to turn our back on him. For Jesus, the wilderness is where he takes time to sort out his priorities – and we need also to ask ourselves, 'What are our priorities?'

Temptation is nice! If it wasn't, we wouldn't be tempted. 'To tempt' in English usually means 'to lead astray': here in Matthew, 'to tempt' means 'to test' and does not have any connotation of good or evil. We all need times when we test our aims and our priorities or we will just drift from one thing to another. Temptation is not to do with fantasising about what we can do but rather facing up to our own potential and ability and using them aright. We are tested, tempted, through our thoughts and feelings, and there is nothing wrong in this. Temptation shows we are alive! But choice matters – how we use our God-given powers and freedom matters.

The temptations of Jesus are a four-pronged attack. Each temptation is meant to lead Jesus astray. The first temptation is usually not noticed, even though in Matthew it appears twice – once in this passage at verses 3 and 6, and again at the crucifixion [27:40]. It is contained in the tiny word 'if'. Too often we fail because we are filled with self-doubt and doubt in God – often because we haven't spent enough time getting to know ourselves or God!

The temptation to turn stones into bread is two-fold: look after yourself, bribe other people to follow you. If you give people things, you will have a following. Jesus has come to serve, and he knows that people need more than food and things – they need to know their Creator. He responds with a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3.

In the next temptation the devil also uses Scriptures, quoting Psalm 91: 11, 12. To quote or know Scriptures is not enough in itself! We need to seek to live by them. Again, the temptation is twofold: give people certain assurances and force God to act. Make God do your will by being reckless and foolish and expect him to save you. Now Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16.

Often thoughts and feelings are liars! The devil offers Jesus the world – it is not his to give [see Psalm 2:8] Turn from worshipping God and worship anything else -whatever it is, it doesn't matter. The devil wanted Jesus to compromise and to give in to evil, even if only a little. For the moment Jesus chases the devil off with another quote from Deuteronomy. But he knows the devil will return.

An illustration – also by David Adam:

One of the Desert Fathers prayed that all his passions should be taken away so that he should not be tempted. He then went to one of the Elders and said: 'You see before you a man who is not tempted and is at rest.' The Elder replied: 'Go and pray that some struggle is stirred up within you for the soul only matures through its battles against evil.'

The monk did as he was asked and when temptation came, he didn't ask to escape it but instead prayed: 'Lord, give me the strength to get through the fight.'

Temptation is part of being alive to what is around us. We will be tempted – tested – as long as we live.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we are reminded today, in this season of Lent, of the time you spent in the wilderness – facing choices, wrestling with temptation, experiencing a period of testing which would shape the course of your ministry: a time which reminds us of your humanity, which tells us you were one with us, tempted just as we are.

We thank you that you came through that time the stronger – more sure of the path you must take, and more confident of your ability to take it. We pray now for people experiencing their times of testing.

We pray for those facing difficult and demanding choices – ones which entails pain & self-sacrifice, the letting go of cherished dreams or facing awkward facts about themselves and others.

We pray for those wrestling with temptation – torn between conflicting desires, unsure of where they stand, uncertain about their ability to stay firm.

We pray for those experiencing a time of testing in their lives – problems they fear they cannot cope with, challenges they feel unable to rise to, questions they would rather not face.

Lord Jesus Christ, give strength to all facing such times – a sureness of purpose and clearness of mind. Give the knowledge of your will – the courage to make the right decisions and the resolve to see them through. May each emerge the stronger for all they experience and better equipped to face the future.

In the wilderness of life today, be present, O Lord,
for it is in your name we pray. Amen.

Close:

Living God, It is easy to fool ourselves that we are observing Lent – giving up certain vices – denying ourselves particular pleasures – making bold resolutions.

It's easy to imagine this is what Lent is all about – but it is not.

For Lent is, above all, a time for reflection – for self-examination – for prayer – for renewed commitment.

Help us always to reflect – to search ourselves – to seek your guidance – to offer you our love.

Help us always to hear your voice and to be strengthened in the service of Christ. Amen.

*Unless otherwise designated Copyright Roots For Churches Limited [www.rootsforchurches.Com]
Reproduced with permission.*