

Lent in Art

A Visual Devotional

Duccio

Storm on the Sea of Galilee



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Instructions

Day 1

1. Read Matthew 4:1-11 and compare the account with the painting.
2. Read the section above entitled “The Reading.” This will help you gain insight into the characters on the boat and the scene.
3. Read “The Contemplation” section entitled “A Physical Temptation.”
4. Satan’s attack focused on getting Jesus to doubt that he was the son of God and find tests to affirm his sonship? In what ways have you doubted your value to God?
5. KIDS: Today we are going to focus on the painting with a scavenger hunt. After finishing the scavenger hunt ask kids if there is anything in the painting that they find curious and want to know more about. Encourage discussion, don’t worry about leaving questions unanswered, paintings often leave us with more questions than answers.
 1. Find the four wings.
 2. Find the bats wings.
 3. Find a tower that is 4 stories high.
 4. Find 4 hands and 2 claws.
 5. Find a stream of flowing water.
 6. Find the 7 castles.

For Day 2 and 3 you have two options:

Option 1

Day 2

1. Read “The Contemplation” section entitled “A Pride Temptation.”
2. Read Genesis 3, this is the account of the temptation of Adam and Eve.
3. How have you struggled with pride and humility in your life?

Day 3

1. Read “The Contemplation” section entitled “A Power Temptation.”
2. Read 1 John 2:15-17.
3. The 1 John passage talks about three areas of temptation: Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life. Do you see any correspondence to the temptation of Christ in these areas? Do you see any correspondence to your life and how you are tempted?



Option 2 (If you don't have children this exercise is still beneficial.)

These next discussions could be involved and so I want there to be time to dwell a bit and come back to the discussion a few times. Your child's age, maturity, and ability to think in the abstract will determine how far these discussions can go. The exercise is equally revealing when done by adults.

Show kids the picture of the iceberg, if they are unaware explain the $\frac{3}{4}$'s of an iceberg is underwater, what we see is just the tip.

The same is true for people. Have kids fill out the iceberg distinguishing what people see of them versus what they are really like. It might be helpful to point out some things about yourself to get kids started.

For instance: People see me as unfriendly, but I'm really shy

People see me as bossy, but I'm really scared sometimes.

Of course, examples don't need to be a negative vs. a positive and often what people see is who we really are. Your examples are just to help them think about how they view themselves versus how others view them. As a parent we are often blind to how our children perceive themselves so it's important to not project but to listen carefully to what children have to say. Genuine conversation requires both parties to take each other seriously, even if one of the parties is a child.

Ask kids if there are things they believe about themselves that are countered by what Jesus says about them. (i.e. "I'm stupid" countered by "I am made in the image of God.") Again, if there is something in your own life that fits this example and is appropriate to share, do so.

Lastly, if your children are old enough discuss how what people saw of Jesus differed from who Jesus knew himself to be. And, following on that, how did Jesus knowledge of himself help him to resist temptation.

*(*** This is a difficult and abstract conversation but introducing the concept that our identity influences our actions can be introduced even if it is not fully understood.)*



The Painting

Duccio di Buoninsegna was a painter during the late 13th, early 14th centuries. His art provides a bridge between the austere Byzantine traditions, the Gothic era and the innovations of the early Renaissance.

Today we are going to be looking at his work, The Temptation of Christ. This painting is part of the Maesta, or Majesty, an altarpiece created for the Cathedral in Sienna. The altarpiece originally consisted of 70 individual paintings and the Temptation of Christ is just one of these.



The Reading

The Temptation of Christ is a retelling of the story told in Matthew 4. Jesus goes into the wilderness to fast and pray for 40 days and 40 nights. At the conclusion of this time Satan appears to Jesus and presents three temptations. Duccio has chosen to paint the moment of Christ resisting the last temptation and sending Satan away.

At the center of this work are the figures of Jesus and Satan. They could not be more different from one another.

Jesus stands firmly on the mountain top, dressed in the traditional colors of red and blue. The red signifies Christ humanity and coming sacrifice. The blue signifies his divine nature and connection to heaven. Jesus is calm and is gesturing for Satan to leave him. Jesus appears noble, even majestic as he stands unmoved by Satan's temptations.

Satan on the other hand is everything that is creepy. Representing evil, Duccio has given us a moving picture of the 14th century understanding of Satan. While many in this era had begun to paint Satan in red, Duccio has chosen this ominous dark grey. The color personifies evil, decay, and the absence of light. Satan stands precariously on the side of the mountain. Or perhaps, hovering in the air, it is hard to tell the artist's intent. What is clear is that he is not standing on solid ground as Christ is.

Here we find a distortion of creation. The medieval understanding that Satan was an angel of extreme beauty who fell due to pride and the desire to be like God is here given form and shape. The beautiful angelic form has been transformed into this mutated creature, part human, part bird, and part goat. With the wings of a bat, the feet of a bird, hands that resemble claws, and a distorted face the once beautiful angel is nowhere to be seen.

The contrast between the two figures is stark and foreshadows the victory that Christ will have over Satan.

The kingdom painted at the feet of Christ bears a striking resemblance to the city of Sienna where this painting will be displayed. Jesus and Satan are clashing over who has authority over the kingdoms of the earth and Duccio has intensified the reality of that struggle by painting a recognizable Sienna as representative of the kingdoms of the earth.

Jesus has come to wage just this battle, to vanquish Satan by dying and rising again to free and reclaim the hearts and minds of the world.



The Contemplation

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' "

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' "

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matt. 4:1-11 NIV)

The Three Temptations

The story that is the basis of Duccio's work can be found in three gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. We will be looking at Matthew's account. There is an intentionality on the part of Jesus and the Spirit in the story.

We normally think of temptation as the devil approaching us, tempting us. Our relationship with Satan is passive. This is not how the text describes the initiation of these temptations. Jesus "was led by the Spirit...to be tempted by the devil." The Spirit initiates the coming confrontation.

In Mark's account the language is even stronger, the Spirit drives him into the wilderness. The Spirit not Satan is in control. The language in the Lord's Prayer: "lead me not into temptation." reflects this idea. In the Lord's Prayer we are not praying that God will protect us from Satan, but that God or the Spirit will not lead us into temptation.

A Physical Temptation

The first temptation appears to be an obvious one. Jesus fasts for forty days and then we are told he is hungry. (Quite the understatement I'm thinking.) Jesus is in the wilderness; he will not have access to food for some time yet. The devil tempts him to perform a magic trick and turn stones to bread.



This temptation is layered and not as simple as it first appears. The devil appeals to many parts of Jesus' psyche in this temptation.

First, he challenges Jesus' sense of identity saying, "If you are the Son of God..." The devil tries to provoke Jesus by questioning his identity and forcing Jesus to act to defend himself. Basically, stating that if Jesus cannot make bread out of stones, He can't possibly be the Son of God.

Satan adds to the taunting by telling Jesus to 'command' the stones. This wording challenges Jesus' power. Satan intimates that if Jesus doesn't change the stones it is because he isn't powerful enough to do so.

While we frequently read this first temptation as a physical one about hunger, the wording of Satan's taunt reveals much more. Satan's challenge is to provoke Christ to action much as a school yard bully would do.

The taunting is ineffective. Christ understands his power, his identity as the Son of God defines his every word and action. Identity is what mitigates the temptations that Satan throws at him. It is not exceptional willpower that kept Christ from giving into the temptations and changing stones to bread, it's the understanding of who He is, what His mission is, and where the power lies.

Identity is also key to how we handle the temptations and challenges that come at us in life. If we identify as sons and daughters of God how does that knowledge strengthen us, affect our choices, protect us from wrongdoing. If we believe we are loved and precious to God, does that provide protection from the temptations the world throws at us.

Finally, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 in response to the temptation. Quoting scripture is a pattern that will repeat in all three temptations.

A Pride Temptation

The second temptation is wild.

First, Jesus is moved by the devil from the wilderness to the city of Jerusalem, specifically the pinnacle of the temple. We are not told how this happens, just that it does. The pinnacle of the temple is most likely the southeastern corner of the temple mount complex. This corner overlooked the Kidron valley and at the time of Jesus would have been a 450-foot drop from the corner to the valley floor.

Satan 'tempts' Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle. Why throwing oneself off a cliff would be tempting is hard to imagine. Apparently, the thrill of seeing people immediately worship you might be what Satan is going for here.

Again, this is a taunt about who Jesus is and if God will step in and care for him. Satan uses Scripture to deliver the jab quoting Psalm 91:11-12. "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."



Jesus counters with Scripture again, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 that we are not supposed to test God. Jesus is secure in the knowledge that he is God's beloved son, he doesn't need to test it. Satan is trying to get Jesus to doubt, to question God's love but Jesus refuses to entertain those thoughts.

For us, as we struggle with doubts and temptations, we need to remember that we have the power to choose one thought over another. We can counter the untruths that might ensnare us with the truths about our identity in Christ.

I was called to help a High Schooler girl who was, let's just say scary. She was mean, only wore black, shoplifted, did drugs, and had been kicked out of all the continuation schools in our area. After hearing her say for the 20th time that 'no one likes me, so it doesn't matter anyway' I called her on the statement. After a great deal of discussion, we came up with 3 people who she was willing to admit might like her. Every time she said, 'no one likes me' I made her say 'at least 3 people like me'. We countered her untruth with truth.

Over the next few weeks she was with me a lot. I took her to the girls Bible Study I hosted, park days with my kids, and church. When I'd first asked my son, in front of her, if he liked her, he said, "I'm scared of her." After a few days he told her he liked her, and we upped her number to 4. Within two weeks we had 25 people who had told her they wanted to be included in the 'liked' list. Eventually she admitted that God liked her too. That was huge.

She is unrecognizable as that young girl today. She's married with three beautiful girls of her own.

Her temptations were many: drugs, alcohol, stealing, and anger to name a few. The journey to healing wasn't a straight line, but changing her identity, speaking truths to the lies, and embracing the power to choose one thought over another transformed her and eventually brought her back into relationship with God.

What are the untruths you've accepted about yourself...that you are unworthy, unloved, broken, a failure??? You have the power to speak truth to those lies, to replace those beliefs with the message Jesus brought; that you are loved, you are accepted, you are part of the family.

A Power Temptation

The third temptation is the most significant and the focus of our painting. This temptation gets to the core of the battle between the devil and the Christ.

Again, the devil takes Jesus to what is called "a high mountain" We are not told where this high mountain is. The devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory if Jesus will simply fall down and worship him.



The response of Jesus here is different from the first two responses. He still quotes Scripture, but he also sends Satan away saying, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

The offer of Satan is genuine, he is the prince of this world. This offer foreshadows the battle that Jesus has come to wage. Jesus’ entire incarnation, his ministry on earth is to establish his authority over the nations and to remove the one obstacle, unforgiven sin, from the equation.

Satan here offers Jesus a quick fix, a way to have it now without all the work. (See Matthew 28:18-20, Revelation 11:15)

In this temptation, where Satan has really laid everything on the table, Jesus ends the exchange sending Satan away. Interestingly, when Jesus issues a direct command Satan obeys. While Satan has questioned Jesus authority, he ultimately must submit to it.

Jesus has come to earth to decisively answer the question of who has power and authority, and to break any claims Satan has to God’s people or kingdom.

If you want more devotional material with a Lent theme that is focused on great works of art you can go to KellyBagdanov.com where you can purchase a video Lent Devotional which includes 20 works of art and explained in video and print format.

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