

This morning, we are going to continue in our teaching series through the Gospel of Luke; as we begin let me encourage you to grab your bible and turn with me to Luke 3:21. I said last week that the word “gospel” simply means “good news.” Luke’s “Gospel” is a written account of good news that is centred upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Last week, we looked at Luke’s introduction to John the Baptist. John “*went into all the country around the Jordan [River], preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*”¹ His message was simple: “Ready or not, the Lord is coming. Prepare your hearts, repent and return to the Lord or you will miss out on what He brings—forgiveness, life, salvation.”

Last week I introduced you to a little friend of mine—bobblehead Jesus. I suggested that many people are searching for a god like bobblehead Jesus: always available and easy to talk to, a powerful friend who always says “yes” to what you want—a push-over god that can be bent to your agenda. Apart from sharing a name, the Jesus of history—the Jesus we read about in the Scriptures—has almost nothing in common with bobblehead Jesus.

This morning we are going to unpack three events from the life of Jesus—His baptism, His testing, and His most important sermon. I am going to deal with each event on its own, but before I do, I want to simply note the masterful way in which Luke has brought these three events together. Allow me to make two observations:

- Each of these events highlights the important relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Luke 3:22 tells us that at Jesus’ baptism, “*the Holy Spirit descended on him.*” Luke 4:1 tells us that after His baptism, “*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness*”. And finally, Jesus began His most important sermon by quoting Isaiah 61:1, “*The Spirit of the Lord is on Me*”. I’ll say more about this shortly, but for now simply note that Jesus’ relationship with the Holy Spirit is the paradigm for our own.
- Here’s a second observation: each of these events reveals Jesus’ unique identity and mission. In the first two events, Jesus is named as God’s Son; in the third event, Jesus reveals what He has come to do. With these observations before us, let’s now turn our attention to the first event, Jesus’ Baptism.

1. Jesus’ Baptism (Luke 3:21-22): As I read the text, listen for three distinct movements. “*When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, **heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’***”

I’m going to briefly address these movements, but first let’s consider the meaning and importance of Jesus’ baptism. *If John’s baptism was a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” and Jesus was sinless, why was His baptism necessary? If Jesus had nothing to repent of, and nothing to be forgiven for, why be baptized?*

¹ Luke 3:3.

In order to get at the answer, we need to understand our theology of the incarnation. In 451 A.D., theologians, priests, and bishops came together to defend Christian orthodoxy against heretical teaching concerning the nature of Christ. Certain people were teaching that Jesus was not fully God, while others taught that Jesus was not fully human. At the Council of Chalcedon, the church fathers wrote a statement, a creed, that definitely stated what the Christian church had always believed.

In the person of Jesus Christ we have both the human being, Jesus of Nazareth, and, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus is one person with two natures—He is fully God and fully man. In Jesus Christ, God came to humanity, but in order to be God's agent of salvation, He also needed to be humanity's representative.

We regularly use this language of representation in connection with Jesus' death; we say things like *Jesus died on the cross in our place, for our sake*. But when we understand that this language of representation also applies to Jesus' life—not just His death—we are better able to make sense of what's going on in the Gospel stories.

Many scholars believe, and I with them, that Jesus' baptism was a representative act—Jesus was taking up humanity's story as His own. As the Bible describes it, the human problem can be traced back all the way to the Garden of Eden; in turning away from God, humanity turned toward death. Though God called Israel to be His firstborn son, like Adam, Israel refused to be a faithful, obedient, son.

Many of you know Israel's central story—enslaved in Egypt, they cried out for deliverance and God raised up Moses. When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, they had to pass through both water (the Red Sea

and the Jordan River) and wilderness before entering the promised land.

Jesus' baptism and temptation are representative acts; He is re-enacting Israel's story, but He will be the faithful and obedient Son that Adam and Israel were not. He too will pass through water—in His baptism—and the wilderness—in His temptations—in order to secure humanity's salvation.

It's important to understand *what* Jesus was doing, in order to understand *why* He is such good news. What Jesus accomplished, He accomplished for our sake; even now Jesus is at the Father's right hand, representing us, interceding for us.

Let me offer a brief commentary on three movements within Jesus' baptism. First, *heaven was opened*. In Isaiah 64:1, the prophet Isaiah asks God to tear open the heavens, to come down, and to lead Israel out of slavery just as He did in the exodus. Isaiah's prayer is answered in Jesus' baptism; heaven was opened, God has come in the flesh to save His people.

Second, *the Holy Spirit descended*. When God the Son embraced our humanity, He embraced all of the limitations that mark us, except that He was without sin. Jesus was the faithful and obedient Son, and it was the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that fuelled His obedience, His miracles, and His mission throughout His life. Jesus did what He did because of His reliance on the Holy Spirit. Jesus' relationship with the Holy Spirit is the paradigm for our own.

Third, *a voice came from heaven*. One author writes, “few moments are as important as when heaven speaks”.² “*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*” The Voice—that is, the voice of God the Father—reveals Jesus’ identity. The words that the Father speaks are rooted in Psalm 2:7-8 and Isaiah 42:1.

I’ve already said that Jesus’ baptism was a representative act—all the hopes of humanity were taken up by Him—but there was also something very personal happening in His baptism. Before Jesus began His public ministry—before He went anywhere, taught anything, or did anything—He was affirmed by His Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

One of the most fundamental truths I know is that God is love; Jesus experienced this love at His baptism. Perhaps this morning you need this truth to become personal—God loves you with the same love that He has for His Son. Before the conclusion of our service, we’d love to pray with you, that you might come into a greater experience of God’s love.

Let’s now turn our attention to the second event, Jesus’ testing, found in Luke 4:1-13.

2. Jesus’ Testing (Luke 4:1-13): *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” 4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”*

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” 12 Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.”

The text doesn’t tell us what was going through Jesus’ mind during those 40 days in the wilderness, but His response to temptation gives us clues as to what He was thinking about. I’ve already spoken about Jesus, using the language of representation—He has passed through the water and now He must pass through the wilderness.

What do we know about Israel’s journey through the wilderness?

We know that throughout their 40 years in the wilderness, Israel regularly chose their own way instead of God’s way; they chose independence over obedience. The book of Deuteronomy contains Moses’ final message to Israel before they entered the promised land—it contains a message of invitation and warning. The book of Deuteronomy can be summarized in the following four phrases:

² Darrell L. Bock, *NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 112.

Don't go your own way. Remember God. Listen to God. Follow God. I think Jesus was contemplating this book and these messages during His time in the wilderness.

It's interesting to note that Israel and Jesus faced similar wilderness tests. In the wilderness, Israel experienced hunger in order to learn that one does not live by bread alone (Deut. 8:3). God supernaturally provided bread every morning. In the wilderness, Israel was instructed to forsake all other gods and follow Yahweh alone (Deut. 6:4-15). In the wilderness, Israel was instructed not to put God to the test (Deut. 6:16). In every case, Israel failed to be God's faithful, obedient son.³

Three times the devil tempted Jesus to act in ways that would ultimately undermine His status as the faithful, obedient, Son of God. The devil didn't try to dissuade Jesus from the mission, instead, he tempted Jesus to take shortcuts in His pursuit of the mission. Each of the three tests, were invitations to independence. But in each test, Jesus succeeded where Israel failed. In each test, Jesus resisted the devil, quoting Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy.

In the **first test**, the devil encouraged Jesus to turn stones to bread. *40 days is a long time to be without food; Jesus, aren't you hungry? Maybe God has forgotten about you. God wouldn't want you to be hungry—it's hard for anyone to be on mission with an empty stomach—turn a few stones into bread, meet your own needs, and then you'll have fuel for your mission.*

There's more going here than stones and bread; Jesus was tempted to embrace self-determination and self-reliance. By self-determination I mean the temptation to treat oneself as the centre of the universe—the place where my needs, wants, preferences, and rights reign supreme. By self-reliance I mean the inclination to distrust God and provide for our own needs. Jesus chose to trust His Father—He will provide. Jesus can live without bread for a little while longer, but if He lives without trusting in His Father, the mission will be lost. Jesus resisted the temptation and refused to take matters into His own hands.

In the **second test**, the devil offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world; *"If you worship me, it will all be yours."* We can call this a proper temptation because the devil offers something that Jesus wants—the nations. This temptation tests Jesus' allegiance. Recall the words of Psalm 2:7-8, words originally given to King David, but applied to Jesus at His baptism. *"You are my son...Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."*

The Father promised that Jesus would receive the nations, but the devil offers a bright, shiny, shortcut. *Jesus, why are you waiting? Why suffer the rejection and humiliation of the cross? The nations can be yours now if you just bow down and worship me!* It's a shortcut. The true temptation lay in trying to get Jesus to do the work of God in an anti-god kind of way. You've heard the phrase, "the end justifies the means"—Jesus' knew that sometimes the wrong means will obliterate the end. Jesus refused to take the shortcut; He will not give worship to another.

³ Joel B. Green, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke*, 192. C.f. Ex.17:1-7; Deut 9:6-29; Acts 7:35, 39-43.

In the **third test**, the devil tempted Jesus to make a name for Himself. He took Jesus to the top of the Temple and encouraged Him to take a flying leap. *Why not jump Jesus? Thousands will see it, love it, and begin to follow you—don't you want to gather disciples? Besides, you'd be perfectly safe; don't you trust that God will rescue you?* Jesus trusts the Father—that's not the issue—but He will not put God to the test, nor will He do the spectacular simply to draw a crowd.

Before we move on to the third event, I want to offer one final thought. The devil used particular tests to undermine Jesus; he may or may not use the same tests with us. What we do know is that temptation seeks to undermine our faithfulness to God. There is the Voice that comes from heaven that leads to life, and there is a voice that comes from the evil one that leads to death—*which voice is guiding you?*

illus: In Greek mythology the story is told of Jason, the son of a murdered king. In order to claim his father's throne, Jason and the Argonauts set sail on a quest to find a golden fleece—the symbol of authority and kingship. At one point in their journey, they came upon three rocky islands that were inhabited by the Sirens. The Sirens were enchanted women who sang irresistibly beautiful songs that enticed sailors to sail into the rocks and to their doom.

When the Argonauts heard the Siren's song, they turned their ship towards the rocks, but just in time, Orpheus pick up his lyre and began to play. So beautiful was his music, that Sirens' music was drowned out. One voice led to death, and another to life. At His baptism Jesus heard the voice of the Father, in the wilderness Jesus

meditated on the word of God. In the time of testing Jesus listened to the Father's Voice; so can we.

Let's turn our attention to the third event, Jesus' sermon, beginning in Luke 4:14.

3. Jesus' Most Important Sermon (Luke 4:14-30)

*“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. **15** He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. **16** He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

***18** “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” **20** Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. **21** He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

In my opinion, this is Jesus' most important sermon because in it He reveals His identity and mission—I would argue that from this point on, everything Jesus says and does ties back to this proclamation.

How does Jesus understand His identity? He is humanity's representative, and He is also God's agent of salvation—Jesus

understands His unique role. “*The Spirit of the Lord is on me; He has anointed me; He has sent me*”. Jesus described His mission in terms of good news—for the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, and the oppressed; Jesus came announcing the year of the Lord’s favour.

Let’s take a closer look; who is this good news is for? *Who are the poor?* In the ancient world, poverty included, but went beyond, the issue of economics. A tax collector might be rich, but have no friends, family, or reputation—the “*poor*” includes anyone without status in the community. The good news is that salvation is available for all, but especially for those who exist on the boundaries, for those who have nothing, and those have been made to feel they are nothing. No matter who you are and what you’ve done, Jesus has made a way for you to join God’s family.

Many suffer from a kind of blindness—they’ve been searching for love, for peace, for hope, but it feels like they’ve been stumbling around in the dark. Jesus can give you your sight back; when we look to Him we see both the face of God and our true humanity.

To those who are enslaved in a prison of their own making, Jesus brings good news—He can rescue and deliver us. The Bible speaks of sin, not simply as the wrong things we do, but as an enslaving force—we find ourselves doing what we do not want to do. Jesus offers forgiveness and freedom—He can break the power of sin and bring transformation.

After reading from Isaiah’s scroll, Jesus said, “**Today** this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Not yesterday, not someday, but today —“*the good news I’m announcing is available today, in Me.*”

How did the crowd respond? Vs. 22, “*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. ‘Isn’t this Joseph’s son?’ they asked.*” At first, they were drawn in by His incredible words; His good news spoke to the longings of all of Israel. *Isn’t this Joseph’s son?* In other words, “*He’s one of our own; He’ll make sure that we get an extra portion of God’s blessing.*” They wanted a Jesus bobblehead—an all powerful friend that they could bend to their own agenda.

Jesus picked up on their intention and immediately let them know that their home-town-claim wouldn’t hold—Jesus will do what the Father asks, not pander to their requests. Like the prophets Elijah and Elisha (vs. 24-27), He will bring God’s salvation to “outsiders”—to the poor, the sinful, and the lowly.

Vs. 28-30, “*All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*”

Conclusion: as I conclude my sermon this morning, I am aware that it has been heavy on explanation and light on application—this has been intentional. There are certainly things that we can learn from these three events, things that we can put into practice in our lives, but I wanted to cast a vision of Jesus—His identity and His mission.

One author writes, “Jesus is not like anyone who came before him or anyone since... There have been other great teachers, prophets, and kings, but there is only one who has combined all of those roles as God’s Son... The significance of that reality is that when one comes

to Jesus, one is not approaching one truth among many...in order to know the Father, one must know the Son.”⁴

Jesus is *truly* human, but He is not *merely* human. As humanity's representative, Jesus succeeded where all others have failed; He is the faithful and obedient Son. At the cross, the Son of God offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice. In Jesus Christ, God has come to us—to love, forgive, heal, and save.

The same four phrases I used to summarize Deuteronomy are fitting when applied to the Lord Jesus Christ: *Don't go your own way. Look to Jesus. Listen to Jesus. Follow Jesus.* How you respond to Him depends on where you stand today. Are you looking for truth, for love, for peace? Turn to Him today. Are you already following Jesus? Lift up your hands in praise; He loves you with an everlasting love!

Jesus is good news—the best news of all.

Prayer

The Lord's Supper

Worship

Benediction: *May the love of God the Father surround you, the power of the Holy Spirit fill you, and the presence of Jesus go with you today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.*

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 120.