

## **Matthew 4:1-11: Testing of Jesus**

**Rev. Ron Clark**

**Hurst AME Church**

**Winter Haven FL**

**(PEACE Polk County organization)**

4 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.

Historical Context:

Jesus was just baptized by John the Baptist and was about to begin his ministry. He was given power on earth fulfill his mission to "proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free." He was going into the wilderness to fast and pray and prepare himself for his mission of justice.

Looking at Matthew 4:1-11...

The enemy tries to pervert his power to prevent his mission of justice by:

1. Having Jesus focus on his personal needs rather than the needs of others.
2. Perverting scripture to convince him to take the easy road out.
3. Asking him to bow down to the market God and hoard wealth and power

How do these same temptations affect us in our congregations/justice ministries today?

1. We only "care about issues that affect us" rather than caring about our neighbors' needs
2. We misuse scripture to justify staying in our comfort zone (Ex: Deuteronomy 15:11)
3. "Superstar syndrome" and being "Gods of Fame" become more important than ensuring the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, and the oppressed are invited to the banquet table.

Will we fall into temptation or remember the call that we have to do justice? Will we simply worship Jesus or follow Jesus?

# **JANUARY 1, 2017      1 Christmas**

Rev. Randall L. Weinkauff

Immanuel Lutheran Church and University Student Center

2104 Bob Billings Parkway

Lawrence, KS 66049

(Justice Matters organization)

Now after [the wise men] had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are  
no more.”

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazore-an” (Matthew 2:13-23).<sup>1</sup>

First Sunday after Christmas, Gospel  
Year A, Revised Common Lectionary

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, our Lord,

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 2016—

- Throughout November and December, we looked forward with anticipation to those days.
- We eagerly longed to join in Christmas celebrations of various sorts with family, friends, and church members.
- We found ourselves humming, perhaps even singing out loud, Christmas songs and carols.
- We couldn't wait to open our gifts from our special loved ones, or to watch our children or grandchildren open their presents.
- With Christmas Day falling on a Sunday, we longed for that extra day or two off from work.

All these things have come and all these things have gone. Everything for which we had hoped, all those things for which we had planned and worked are now in the past. Today we stand in the shadow of Christmases past.

In November and December we involved ourselves with Christmas sales and Christmas presents, Christmas decorations and Christmas trees, Christmas parties and Christmas songs. If we are totally honest with ourselves—and I would ask, brutally honest with ourselves—each one of us suffered, at least to some degree, with a condition I term “the Scrooge syndrome.” Yes, “the Scrooge syndrome.” We just might feel, “Christmas, bah, humbug!” now that the holiday is over.

For example: Which parents among us, who have school aged children, haven't been counting the days until January 5<sup>th</sup>, to that blessed and glorious day when school resumes and the children simply go away? Which school-aged children among us haven't been counting the days until January 5<sup>th</sup>, so they can get out of the house, go back to school, and spend time with friends, finally being rid of Mom and Dad? After opening her Christmas gift, what person among us doesn't wonder on which planet her spouse or significant other was raised, having received once again an inappropriate, unwanted, or simply weird gift? And when the bills from VISA, MasterCard, Discover, and American Express begin to arrive in the mail, filled with Christmas charges, who among us

won't wonder if we all might be better off without this ridiculous Christmas thing?

"The Scrooge syndrome." It's very real. However, it should not surprise us that this season can bring out the less than desirable side of us. That Christmas can turn ordinary, loving people into touchy, grouchy, even mean, hateful, and vindictive women and men. This really shouldn't surprise us. After all, when we honestly look at the first Christmas, we see that it, too, was one full of hatred, havoc, even death.

Matthew begins the story this way:

Now when [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (Matthew 2:13).

Perhaps it was during the first Christmas season, more than likely it was up to two years later, that the wise men arrived in Bethlehem to worship Jesus. By the time of the visit of the wise men, "the Scrooge syndrome" had raised its ugly head. King Herod was determined to destroy the Christ child. For whatever reason, King Herod had no room in his heart, no room in his life, no room in his kingdom for any newborn "king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2), even if he were to be the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Thus, perhaps out of fear, or maybe jealousy, or possibly paranoia, King Herod ordered the deaths of Bethlehem's infant boys under the age of two years, to kill the rival king. Now before we mercilessly condemn King Herod for his horrific actions, let us take a moment and look at ourselves. In many ways, this story is about you and me. We are King Herod. Okay, so maybe we haven't murdered infant baby boys. Nevertheless, we all too often act just like King Herod. Many times, all too many times, we, too, have no room in our heart and no room in our lives for any King of the Jews, for any Prince of Peace.

For example: What does it mean to say, "Jesus is Lord"? What is implied when you or I say, "Jesus is *my* Lord"? Is Jesus the ruler of our life? Have we adopted God's will as our will? Are all our desires God's desires? Is the way Jesus lived his earthly life the pattern we try to mimic in living our earthly life? When confronted with options for solving a problem, do we choose the Christian option, the loving option, the one that is in absolute, complete, and total accord with God's laws and commandments?

Or are we something of a rebel? Do we fight against anyone and anything, including God, so we can be free from following God's rules and regulations? To be free to make up our own mind? To be free to make decisions for ourselves? To be answerable to no one? To be the master of our fate? To be the captain of our soul?

Like King Herod, we would have no room in our heart or life for any monarch, any ruler other than ourselves. The reality is that, in our state of rebellion, we too seek the death of Jesus. We too desire to destroy the Christ child.

What do you and I do, though, when life does not go our way? When our plans fall apart? When life simply might stink? In times like this, we forget about God and long to go to Egypt.

Remember the Old Testament story when, during the time of Abraham and Sarah, famine came upon the land of Canaan. What did this couple do? They sought refuge in Egypt.

Remember the Old Testament story when, during the time of Jacob, famine came upon the land of Canaan. Where did Jacob send his sons to find food, to secure their future? They sought shelter in Egypt.

And, by the time of Moses, what nation had enslaved the children of Israel? Had oppressed them by forcing inhumane working conditions upon the Israelites? Even had ordered the deaths of all newborn boys?

What political system set itself up against the people of God? What system promoted the status quo? What nation caused great misery and suffering? Egypt!

And when King Herod sought the death of the newborn “king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2), of the promised “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), where of all places did Joseph take the Holy Family for safety? Egypt!

Here in Lawrence, many fear for the safety of their families and themselves. The Biblical verses of “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5) and “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1) are long forgotten. Thus, they support the construction of an enlarged jail, to house those who are so dangerous to our society—

- those who can't afford to post bail,
- those who miss court appearances,
- those who enjoy a little weed,
- those whose mental illnesses prevent them from acting in ways generally acceptable.

Egypt, represented by our County Commissioners, will take care of the population, provide safety, and rid all undesirables from public view. All for the measly sum of 30 million dollars.

As we all know, promising safety and security, Egypt in the end enslaves. The children of Israel became slaves of their Egyptians overlords. Jesus had to leave Egypt, following the death of Herod, or he never could have fulfilled his call to save the world. If Douglas County expands the county jail, it too will enslave more and more of God's people, of your and my sisters and brothers.

Even so, God called Moses to lead God's people from Egypt to freedom. God commissioned Jesus to save from sin all of God's people. And this same God has commanded you and me to set free those who are imprisoned.

Two Sundays ago, I based my sermon on the words of Micah 6:8, “to do justice...love kindness...and walk humbly with [one's] God.” Last Sunday, I preached on the prophet's call from Isaiah, chapter 58:

Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?  
(Isaiah 58:6-7).

Having heard God's Word, I then commissioned 30-some members of this congregation to serve as Immanuel's Justice Network Members. They work with our Justice Team to emancipate God's people, to set the prisoners free, to declare freedom for all.

I personally can't change the minds of the County Commissioners. The five members of our Justice Team cannot change the minds of the commissioners. Our 30-some Justice Network Members themselves probably cannot change the minds of the commissioners. However, if we take seriously the call to work for justice, together, all of us together, in concert with the members of the other 20 congregations involved with Justice Matters, can change minds. Imagine the 10,000 congregants we represent calling for justice, 10,000 people working for change, 10,000 people crying, "Let my people go!" (Exodus 9:1). Together we can change minds.

Rather than incarcerating more and more fellow citizens, we will be agents of healing for those undergoing a mental crisis. Rather than incarcerating more and more fellow citizens, we will be agents of healing for those who otherwise would spend six months in jail for minor misdemeanor charges. Rather than incarcerating more and more fellow citizens, we will be agents of healing for those who need a hand up, not a handout.

Christmas 2016 arrived one week ago today. Most, if not all, of us have experienced, to some degree or another, "the Scrooge syndrome." And if, by chance, there is someone among us who is a saint, an individual who didn't experience this syndrome, take care! There are still five days remaining in this year's Christmas season. And you, my friend, will be tempted and you too will experience "the Scrooge syndrome," just like the rest of us have.

In our Savior's name. Amen.

## ENDNOTES

1. I have used the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible throughout this sermon, unless otherwise indicated.

2. William Ernest Henley, "Invictus," on [http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/self\\_sufficiency.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/self_sufficiency.htm) (accessed December 30, 2016).