



# Lent One

Read

[Matthew 4:1–11](#)

Text and Land

The temptation (or, better, testing) of Jesus is set in the Wilderness of Judea. This is a small hilly desert created by a rain shadow effect as the clouds pass eastwards over Jerusalem. It has long been a place for outlaws and others seeking solitude to escape from the city.

One of its most famous communities was located at Qumran. This community had its origins in a dispute between rival priestly groups, but it is best known to us because of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves close by their settlement.

Another famous inhabitant of this isolated wilderness was John the son of Zechariah, better known to us as “John the Baptist”. He made the wilderness his base, but also reached out to a wider audience as he invited them to be baptized in a public ritual of spiritual renewal.

Later large numbers of Christian monks came to seek solitude in this small desert that was also so close to the major holy sites. At the peak of this movement there were up to 30,000 monks living in almost 60 monasteries across this mostly barren landscape. So much for escaping into a place of solitude!

Today the wilderness of Judea is again dotted with new communities. These are the homes of Jewish settlers seeking to create ‘facts on the ground’ to bolster Israel’s claim to the Palestinian territories that will have been under military occupation for 50 years this June.

Into this landscape with its ancient and modern traditions of dissent and religious fervor came Jesus of Nazareth. He was fresh from his own baptism by John, and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) describe him spending time alone in the wilderness. Both Matthew and Luke preserve a tradition about the testing of Jesus as Satan seeks to divert him from the best to the good.

Questions for Discussion

- For me the temptation of Jesus evokes the 1963 children’s book, [Where the Wild Things Are](#), by Maurice Sendak. How does the idea of Jesus going to spend time with the ‘wild things’ (cf. Mark 1:13) resonate with your own sense of discipleship and testing?
- What is our most tempting temptation, and what spiritual resources do we draw upon to deal with this?
- Is the figure of Satan a meaningful way for you to imagine the reality of evil? What other expressions of evil do you find speak to you today?
- In Matthew’s account of the testing of Jesus, we see examples of ‘unholy use of holy scripture’ as Satan uses the Bible to mislead Jesus. What are some ways that you see Scripture being abused and misused today? What ways of using the Bible strike you as healthy and holy?

Prayer

*One does not live on bread alone, but by the word of God. (Matthew 4.4)*

“Each of us has a soul, but we forget to value it. We don’t remember that we are creatures made in the image of God. We don’t understand the great secrets hidden inside of us.”

– St. Teresa of Avila

*Find space to be silent, so that you may hear God’s life-giving words.*

