

Monday, March 6 – Read Mark 1:9-11. Mark's gospel is concise and action-oriented, so it's no surprise that he gave the shortest account of Jesus' baptism we have. The text simply tells what happened, not what led up to it or how the participants felt. *But what happened set the stage for Jesus' entire ministry.* He was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and the voice from heaven affirmed his divine sonship.

Mark used the Greek verb *schizo* to portray what Jesus saw happen to "heaven" (which in New Testament Greek meant the place where God dwells). Mark 15:38 used the same verb, saying the Temple veil was torn in two as Jesus died. In what ways has Jesus' life and death "torn open" heaven for you, and allowed you to move into a closer relationship with God. We sometimes think that the Holy Spirit didn't show up until Pentecost, after Jesus' resurrection. However, the Bible (using words that also mean "breath" or "wind") describes God's Spirit at work throughout history, even at creation (see Genesis 1:2). In what ways have you sensed God's Spirit guiding, comforting or encouraging you?

Tuesday, March 7 - Matthew 3:13-17. John (who called people to repent, and baptized them when they did) tried to stop Jesus from being baptized. He had said that the one coming after him would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). He saw Jesus as that sinless savior, and felt unworthy. But Jesus said, "This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus modeled baptism for us. We value our baptisms as a sign that we choose to follow Jesus, and let him direct our lives. Baptism is a type of washing. We come to God tired and defiled and are washed clean, given a fresh start. Jesus did not need that kind of baptism—he was sinless. Yet he humbly asked to be baptized anyway. Jesus did "what was necessary for us, humbling himself and identifying with our humanity (see Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 2:11-18). What does that tell you about how much he values you? In the words from heaven, discerning readers could hear echoes of Psalm 2:7 (a "royal psalm" the New Testament church applied to Jesus) and Isaiah 42:1, a "servant song" Jesus said shaped and described his mission. How do allusions like these point your heart to the connected sweep of God's grand story in human history?

Wednesday, March 8 – Read Matthew 4:1-11 God's people, Israel, wandered in the desert for 40 years before they entered the Promised Land. The Israelites gave in to the temptation to distrust God (see Numbers 14:28-34). Jesus, God's son, spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness. He, too, was tempted, but did not succumb. He loved and trusted God, and built his life on the Bible's principles. Unlike Jesus, you've probably never been tempted to turn stones to bread. The temptation "fit" him—he could use his power to be the political, material kind of messiah most Israelites hoped for. In what ways have you been tempted to use your unique abilities and powers for our own glory and advancement, rather than to bless others and build God's kingdom? Jesus met temptation with scripture. So can we. Author Gary Smalley advises us to learn Philippians 4:8-9, and check temptations and choices against it before we act: "...if anything is excellent, if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, all that is worthy of praise." What other Bible passages help you resist the lure of evil? Do you, like Jesus, make memorizing key Bible passages part of your life with God?

Prayer: Lord, every day I'm tempted to take my eyes off you. Please help me treasure your word enough to learn it, and bring it to my mind when I need to resist temptation. Amen.

Thursday, March 9 – Read Luke 4:1-13. Luke slightly altered Matthew's account of the temptations. He said Jesus "was tempted for forty days by the devil." He also reversed the last two temptations, perhaps so that the sequence began and ended by emphasizing Jesus' standing as God's son, and the regular temptation to doubt that. Matthew contrasted Jesus' success in withstanding temptation to Israel's failure in the wilderness. Luke went even farther—his genealogy of Jesus ended, in Luke 3:38, with "Adam son of God." That son of God failed when tempted, but Jesus did not. Each wilderness temptation Jesus faced involved an easier path to being the messiah Israel thought they wanted. "Dazzle them with signs, impress them with your power, meet their material needs," the tempter whispered. "Why try to change their earthly focus, and face suffering and death?" In what ways are you tempted to follow Jesus only if it's easy, and doesn't create any risks? How are you opening yourself to Jesus' power to grow the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22) in your life, making it better both now and for all eternity?

Friday, March 10 – "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." Luke 4:13. Jesus had met every challenge the devil brought before him. In his weakened state, he didn't flinch and he didn't give in. You could make the case that the battle for our souls was won here and the rest of the war had to play out. But the enemy wasn't done with Jesus, just yet. He was going to come back. He wasn't going to be defeated and just walk away and pout. He was going to wait for an "opportune time." He first tried to catch Jesus when he was most vulnerable from a physical standpoint. There's a good chance that he would try the same tactic and at the very least, wait for when Jesus had a "vulnerable" moment. This is what happens to us. When we are weak -physically, emotionally or mentally - we can expect the devil to attack. Those are opportune moments. But knowing this, we can prepare ourselves. We can surround ourselves with people who can help us when we are weak and we can God's word hidden in our heart.

Prayer: Lord, every day I'm tempted to take my eyes off you. Please help me treasure your word enough to learn it, and bring it to my mind when I need to resist temptation. Amen.