

Lenten Field Guide // Week 5: When will the angels come?

Forty days of not getting any physical sustenance is no walk in the park. One can speculate the many reasons that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to endure this terrible hardship. One possibility for the reason for this time of trial was so that Jesus could prepare his heart, body, mind, and soul for what lay ahead of him.

Pastor Heather Harriss has beautiful insight on this and writes: “What happens in the wilderness does not stay in the wilderness; rather, it plays again in the life and ministry of God's beloved son (Matt 3:17). The answers are different on different occasions, but the choices are very much the same:

- Jesus refuses in the desert to turn stones into bread to assuage his own hunger, but before long he will feed thousands in the wilderness with just a few loaves and some fish (Matt 14:17-21; 15:33-38), and he will teach his disciples to pray to God for their "daily bread" (Matt 6:11).
- He refuses to take advantage of his relationship to God by hurling himself down from the heights of the Temple, but at the end of his earthly ministry he endures the taunts of others (Matt 27:38-44) while trusting God's power to the end upon the heights of a Roman cross (Matt 27:46).
- He turns down the devil's offer of political leadership over the kingdoms of the world, and instead offers the kingdom of the heavens to all those who follow him in the way of righteousness.

She continues, “The wilderness tests of the Temptation account are not a one-time ordeal to get through, but they are tests of preparation for the choices Jesus makes in his earthly ministry. Indeed, readers of Matthew's Gospel have an opportunity to see how the wilderness experience is replayed in Jesus' encounters with persons who are sick, hungry or in need; with persons who use their connections to power (including, perhaps, the lawyers, Pharisees and Sadducees who test him in various ways; e.g., Matt 16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35) to ascertain his loyalty; with persons who too easily worry about the world's assessment of greatness rather than God's (including some of his own disciples; e.g., Matt 18:1-5).”

Pastor Heather writes so beautifully about the reasons for Jesus' temptation in the desert as preparation for his ministry and death to come. Though this may not be the reason for your own trials, it does not mean that the trials you have endured cannot also prepare you for even larger ones down the road. We can speculate that on some days of Jesus' fasting when he was weak with hunger, he might have asked “when will the angels come?” They did eventually come and care for Jesus but on those days of starvation, I'm sure it was hard for Jesus to believe that he would once again have food. But Jesus did, once again, have food and his Spirit was all the more prepared for the evil he had to face in the coming days.

Scripture to consider: Matthew 4:1-11

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. ²After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. ³The tempter came to him and said, “Since you are God's Son, command these stones to become bread.”⁴Jesus replied, “It's written, *People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*”⁵ After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, ⁶“Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*”⁷Jesus

replied, “Again it’s written, *Don’t test the Lord your God.*”⁸ Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.⁹ He said, “I’ll give you all these if you bow down and worship me.”¹⁰ Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan, because it’s written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*”¹¹ The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

Luke 4:14: ¹⁴ Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside.

John 12:23-26²³ Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. ²⁴ I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Creator will honor whoever serves me.

Journeying through Lent with Children:

Journeying with Children through Lent: For children, Lent can be a time to practice our disciple skills as we get ready for Easter! Because Lent can go on and on and on from a child’s perspective, it is easier for them to commit to practicing a skill for one week rather than for six weeks. What if each week in your home, you practice one skill with your child?

Passing the Peace – practice passing the peace with your family in your home this week. Silently (or aloud if they are practicing too) say “Peace of God be with you” and mean it! As a family, pass the peace to each member of the family once each day at a meal or prayer time.

Acts of Worship: Spend some time this week reflecting on your life’s journeys. Be gentle with yourself as you remember hard times and times of grief or pain. Think about the seasons in your life that felt like you were living in an unknown wilderness. If you are a writer, write down some thoughts and reflections about this. Or if you do not prefer writing, consider sharing your story with a family member or friend. How did these experiences impact your understanding of God? How did they affect your faith in positive and negative ways? As you reflect, if you have the space, offer these reflections up to God in your own way. It’s okay if you are still angry about what happened. It’s okay if you are still sad and the wounds are not scars yet. Things do not have to be resolved for you to reflect on them.

Acts of Devotion and Spirituality: Practice a breath prayer each day this week. Breathe in, saying what you feel: “I am scared, God” or “I am worried, God” or “I am grateful, God” and Breathe out: “God is with me” or “I am named ‘beloved’” or “I am yours, God”

Acts of Justice and Resistance: Consider work that Belmont is connected to and if you are feeling called to get involved: [Open Table Nashville](#)

Acts of Mercy: Consider work that Belmont is connected to and if you are feeling called to get involved: [Community Care Fellowship](#), [Give Ye Them To Eat \(GYTTE\)](#)

[Check out the sermon at this link \(posted on Monday\)!](#)