

A Lenten Baptismal Pilgrimage

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Each year on the First Sunday of Lent, we hear the story of the temptation of Jesus in the desert. In the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the temptation story takes place immediately after Jesus' baptism.

The same Spirit that is bestowed on Jesus at his baptism drives him into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Thrust into the wilderness and guided into a deep solitude with God, Jesus overcomes a confrontation with evil. It is in the wilderness that Jesus manifests his identity as a baptized child of God.

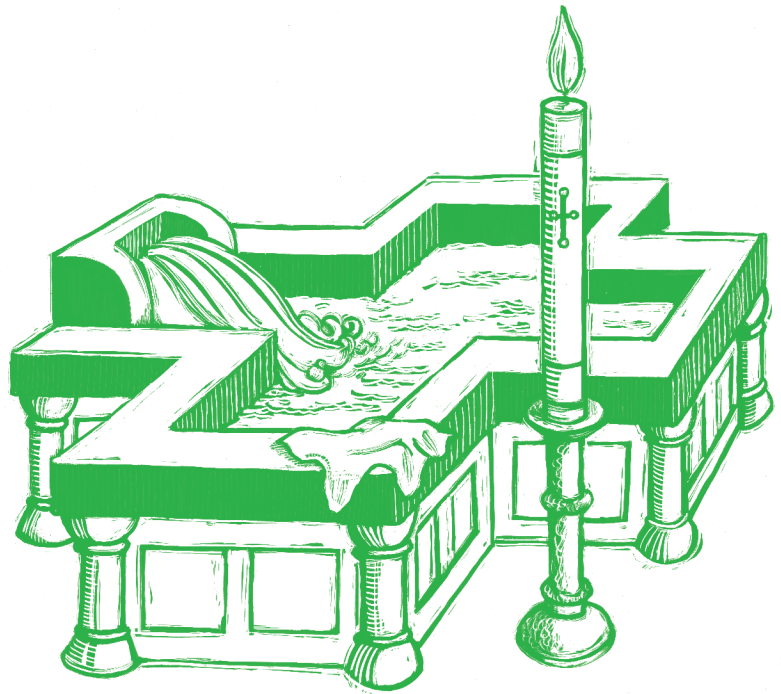
This story is a paradigm for all of us. It reminds us of our Lenten call to spend time in solitude, in prayer, and in fasting, but more than that, it summons us to rediscover what it means to be a baptized child of God.

In the isolation of the wilderness, Jesus hears the voice of the devil testing, tempting, and trying to seduce him. But the voice to which Jesus listens is the voice of God heard at his baptism, "This is my beloved Son." Conscious of his identity as God's beloved Son, Jesus embodies God's will.

Like Jesus, we too are invited to enter into solitude to deepen our relationship with God. Solitude can be uncomfortable. The emptiness and isolation can create anxiety and give rise to voices that tempt us, test us, and tell us untruths. But if we remain in prayer, like Jesus, the solitude can teach us who we really are. Like Jesus, we will hear God's voice above the din, revealing our true identity as God's son, God's daughter, God's beloved. Knowing ourselves as God's beloved gives us the inner peace to overcome any voice that claims otherwise. Recognizing our true identity as the beloved and chosen of God frees us to trust in God's love and to embrace God's will.

One of the ways we can better recognize our identity as God's beloved is to remember our Baptism, even if we were baptized as infants. Where and when were you baptized? Talk with someone who might have been present that day—your parent, godparent, or relative. Locate your baptismal certificate and honor it by putting it in a frame or a scrapbook. Note the day of your Baptism on a calendar so that you can celebrate it every year.

Look at pictures of your Baptism. If you were baptized as an infant, do you see the arms that held you as the arms of God? Do you behold your innocence and vulnerability? If you



Remembering our Baptism is a way of listening to God's voice during Lent and prepares for the renewal of baptismal promises.

were baptized as an adult, do you experience the hand of your godparent or sponsor as the hand of God?

Keep a Lenten journal and reflect on the occasions when you felt God's arms holding you, God's hand guiding you, when you knew yourself as the beloved of God. Consider the baptismal symbols of water, light, the Sign of the Cross, and the community. Write how these symbols help you to understand your Baptism in a deeper way. You were baptized as priest, prophet, and king. What does that mean to you? Reflect on how you are being called to act in this time as priest, prophet, and king.

When we reflect on our Baptism in this way, we will not only enrich our Lenten experience, we will, come Easter Sunday, be better prepared to renew our Baptism and respond with a resounding "I do."