

SERMON FOR 1st SUNDAY OF LENT 2025

ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

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If you have been to the movies over the last decade, you would have seen how many Comic Books based on Superhero's are being made into films. This is obviously not a new trend, but in the past decade it seems to have accelerated.

All these comic books about superheroes and the subsequent movies have almost an identical premise. We have an unsuspecting hero, who becomes some sort of super hero through either a freak accident or having been taken by force and turned into one against his or her will. These scenarios are what is called 'an origin story'. Every superhero needs one, without the origin story we do not understand the characters and their

motivations. These are essential story telling tools to help us find familiarity and understanding in the characters being portrayed. These sorts of stories are not only present in modern comic books however but in fact go back thousands of years. People such as Hercules, Francis of Assisi, The Buddha, are reported to have had similar experiences.

And so, we come today to Jesus' origin story told to us through the Gospel of Luke. This is his origin story because we have little to no information about Jesus' life up to this stage, other than the great events we have celebrated recently, Christmas, Epiphany, Baptism and the Presentation. This Jesus is essentially unknown, he is baptised by John in the Jordan and then proceeds to begin his origin story by entering into the wilderness. It is here that we begin to see the character revealed. We are told of a Jesus who is

tempted by 'the devil', who aims to divert his path, to alter his origin story. But this Jesus is to prove he can overcome, and in doing so, starts to tell us something important about himself, and ultimately his mission.

But as I mentioned earlier, we do have similar stories in history, from Buddha to Hercules to our modern-day superheroes. There is always a time of preparation and trial. Each has to undergo a series of tests, before they can proceed with their mission.

It is useless, in a spiritual sense, for us to speculate that these tests were strictly actual, physical events and to ignore their deeper meanings. The experiences that Jesus goes through, show us, in a spiritual sense, what we all must go through in our own journeys towards God.

So, what are these experiences? And how can they inform us as we go through this season of Lent? I see them as our desires, our fears, and our opinions.

The tempter in the wilderness is in some sense the tempter within us - our lusts, our fears, and our sense of the way things should be. Lust manifested as the desire for food, in Jesus' case. For food is a manifestation of the appetites of the body, which every disciple must confront.

The next temptation was fear. The devil placed Jesus on a precipice, He overcomes fear by knowing the truth - for Jesus, this is the scriptures, - the word of God. Jesus realized that the desire to prove the truth is a form of resistance in itself. He refused to give life to the apparent evil, and by so doing denied it any power.

The third temptation is our opinions and beliefs. This often manifested by our sense of duty, obligation, and the urge to make the world conform to our ideas of how it should be. We could see this as the opinions that others have of us. The devil offered Jesus' rulership over all the kingdoms of the world. This is the classic choice faced by everyone on their journey towards God. When a degree of insight has been attained. We want to set things right. After all, who could be better for the job?

We want to impose our will upon the world and to rule it. In the simplest sense, it is our ideas, our concepts of things, that hold sway over us and not our deepest knowing, which is of God through Christ. The external mind always thinks that it knows best. The inner mind is in touch with God and knows what is needed, what is possible, and what is. We call this the Holy Spirit of God.

Now you may be thinking that this approach can sound like a type of self help teaching by a spiritual guru. For it is reported that even the Buddha went through three trials. And there is a temptation within the Christian tradition to essentially whittle the Gospel down to a form of popular spirituality. But I believe Jesus' wilderness experience is unique. Orthodox Christianity has always claimed that through the incarnation God became a human being. Jesus is this incarnation. And so while faiths like Buddhism, and the Buddha may seek the mind of God through enlightenment, Christianity has always claimed to directly see God through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our enlightenment, and if he is truly God then he displays to us the mind of God, seen in the Gospels.

And in doing so, we start to understand that we have a God who is not distant, who is not detached, but was flesh, blood and bone. Who like us, faced the perils of life and overcame his desires, his fears, and opinions. Other spiritual traditions, for all their

eloquent simplicity and desire to do right can sometimes fall into the trap of over self-reliance. Whereas the Gospel constantly reminds us that we do not find God on our own, but rather God finds us, and delivers us from those things that weigh us down. We see this in Jesus' responses using scripture, which is rooted in an underlying story that he is dependent on God rather than self for life, glory, and identity.

Origin stories are powerful. And so, we too must remind ourselves of our own origin stories, those times when we felt the presence of God during times of trouble or loss or testing. Even those times when we struggled with our belief, these are all a part of our story. But it is equally part of the story of God, the story of all creation. May you know your origin story this Lent and the origin story of our faith, that you may discover your mission and purpose. For as the Anglican priest, theologian, and philosopher Sarah Coakley puts it 'All desire is a desire for God.'

May we foster that desire as we desire God in this season of Lent.