



Driven

Mark 1:9-15

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Our Gospel reading contains **two major events** in the ministry of Jesus. The first is his **baptism** and the second is his **temptations** in the desert. At first look, one seems to be such a high and the other was a low in his life.

Jesus was baptized by John in the river Jordan. We know from an earlier scripture reading that John was baptizing people for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Yet, we claim that Jesus was sinless. He came to the river for a *baptism of solidarity* with the people. Christ's incarnation is meant to be one with us, to take on human sinfulness, fragility, and mortality.

Something miraculous happens at his baptism. The heavens are *torn* open, the Spirit *descends* like a dove, and a voice *speaks*.

In his brevity Mark says a lot with powerful verbs.

The heavens are *torn* open. Mark evokes Isaiah's words, "Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down." The verb "tear" suggests *a violent in-breaking, not a peaceful scene* with a bird. With just one word, Mark accomplishes much, showing that *Christ fulfills the ancient hope*.

The Spirit *descended* on him. He is the anointed of God, the one chosen, blessed, and sent.

A *voice* says, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” A similar declaration is heard at the time of Jesus’ transfiguration on Mount Horeb when a voice speaking to (us) his disciples announces: This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.”¹

In the next scene, the Spirit *drives* Jesus into the wilderness to endure temptations for over a month along with the company of wild animals and angels feeding him.

Again, according to his style, Mark describes the whole event in one single line. The Spirit *drives* Jesus out into the desert.

The verb “drive” is the same the Gospels use to refer to driving out demons and to Jesus' eviction of the people who had turned the temple into a marketplace.

Does being driven by the Spirit mean that Jesus goes to the desert kicking and screaming, not really looking forward to the experience? Who really wants to get into a fight? His resistance necessitates a spiritual driving force. There is much that he is going to face in the years ahead and the Spirit knows better: he needs to prepare.

Do you hear this? Jesus was about to be tempted like you and I, and he didn’t like it one little bit! But the Spirit is his guide and drives him: the first temptation is to avoid the wilderness.

- Is it not when we are faced with important life decisions and we seek a new orientation and meaning of life, or when our life gets turned on its head, like in time of tragedy and loss, that we enter like in a desert, an arid time and space?

¹ Mk 9:7

- Isn't the desert the place and the time when human support is lacking (or undesired, or insufficient) and material means are trivial and superfluous?
- Isn't it then, a time and a space we do not willingly choose to experience, that we face all sorts of wild surprises and angelic support? Disturbing and challenging emotions and people known and unknown showing us kindness? Is the desert an unbearable low only, something to despise?

There are so many things that tempt us, yet I find great comfort in the fact that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted. He was truly human and truly God.

It's important to remember that, like Jesus, we will have highs and lows in our life. It is remembering that we are beloved children of God that matters. And then the lows of life take a different look and can be places of growth.

And like Jesus we, the children of God, enter, with Lent, into the sacred activity of coming to know ourselves and our world from God's perspective.

But, beware! Taking time for sacred leisure can make us vulnerable to being driven like Jesus.

May the Spirit be our guide, our advocate, and our provider.
Amen.