

Who is the Son of God? That should be a pretty easy question for most Christians, right? Jesus is God's Son! We all know that. My confirmands could tell you that. My 8 year old daughter could tell you that. There are probably plenty of kids in the preschool, kindergarten, and Sunday School who could tell you that.

Jesus is God's Son. We confess it every week in the creeds. “And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.” “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God.”

Scripture says it over and over again. Mark's Gospel begins with the clear statement, “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” And John's Gospel ends with the equally certain proclamation, “*these [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*”

And people throughout Jesus' life knew that he was God's Son. The angel Gabriel announced it to Mary, “*the child to be born [to you] will be called holy—the Son of God.*” When asked who he is, Peter tells Jesus without hesitation, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Even the demons that Jesus casts out and the pagan centurion at the foot of the cross all declare that this man is the Son of God.

So it's interesting to me that the devil would twice call that into question in our Gospel lesson today. During Jesus' first temptation, the devil says to him, “*If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.*” And then during the third temptation, he does it again, “*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.*”

If everybody knows that Jesus is the Son of God, then why bother with that kind of temptation? Is there really any chance that Jesus will question his own identity? No. Of course not. That's absurd.

And yet, the devil is many things, but he is not stupid. He's a tad predictable, maybe. Certainly rather blinded by his own arrogance. But he's not dumb. And these temptations in the wilderness were precision strikes on Jesus' humanity and weakness.

No, the devil definitely had a reason for these specific temptations. He had a reason to call into question whether or not Jesus is God's Son. And I think that reason is that it had worked before. Because Jesus isn't the first person to be called God's Son.

It's true. Jesus is the Son of God. And Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God. But he is not the only person in the Bible called God's son.

No, the first person to have that title was the very first man that God created: Adam. In Luke chapter three, Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus. And he traces his lineage all the way back through David the son of Jesse, through Jacob the son of Isaac, through Isaac the son of Abraham, through Noah the son of Lamech, and finally through Adam, the son of God.

Adam was God's son. God was Adam's father. His only father. He had no human father. Much like Jesus, he was created – conceived, if you will – by the Spirit of God. Not in a virgin's womb, but in a lump of dirt that God formed from the ground.

And the devil's temptation to Adam and Eve was not that much different than the temptation that he poses to Jesus. “You are God's son. Yet, he's held something back from you. You are God's son. Yet, he is more powerful than you. You are God's son. Yet, there's something you don't know.”

“If you are the son of God, then why not eat from this tree? Why not know good and evil? Why not be as powerful as God himself? If you are the son of God, what is stopping you?” And the temptation worked. Eve ate of the tree. Adam ate of the tree. And their eyes were opened to just how shameful they had become.

But Adam wasn't alone in being called a son of God. In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of God's Law and of all the different ways that they are to be set apart. And he tells them, “*You are the sons of the Lord your God.*” The Israelites were sons of God as well.

Which makes sense, when you think about it. God may not have physically created them like he created Adam. But he was still very much their Father. Their heavenly Father.

From the time of Abraham, he had adopted the Israelites as his own children. He gave them a home in Canaan. He rescued them from Egypt. He fed them and gave them everything they needed. He established rules for his family to follow. He was their father, they were his sons. God's sons.

But over time, the devil once again uses that title as a source of temptation. Because the longer they tell themselves that they are God's sons the more they abuse that privilege. The more they take that fact for granted.

They see being God's son as something they have inherited because they are descendants of Abraham. Something they have earned by being circumcised and by going to the Temple and by making sacrifices. The prophets try to warn them that God's wrath is coming. That Jerusalem will be destroyed. That many will die. That the rest will be taken into exile.

But the devil just keep whispering in their ear: "If you are the son of God, he'll never let that happen. If you are the son of God, everything will be OK. If you are the son of God, then keep on sinning, God won't care."

They were sons of God. But they became more and more prodigal sons of God. They drew near to God with their mouths and honored him with their lips, but their hearts were far from him. And so God sent them to a far off land, until they learned what it means to be a son of God once again.

Adam was a son of God. The Israelites were sons of God. And last, but not least, we are sons of God. Did you know that? Paul tells us in Romans chapter eight, "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." He says in Galatians three, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." And in Ephesians one, he writes, "In love [God] predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ."

You are a son of God. And that is a wonderful thing. To be loved by God as his child. To be adopted into his family of faith. To receive his kingdom and the glory of the resurrection as an inheritance.

Yet, it also means that you are a target for the devil's temptations. Because being a son of God means you are no longer a son of this world. You are no longer a son of your sinful flesh. You are no longer a son of the devil. You are a son of God and that makes you an enemy of the devil. And just as he used that title to tempt Adam and to tempt the Israelites, so also he uses it to tempt us as well. And we see exactly how he does so in how he tempts Jesus.

*"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."* If you are the son of God, then you shouldn't have to experience discomfort or sadness. You shouldn't have to worry about hunger or poverty. If you are the son of God, then just name it and claim it. Turn that stone into bread. Turn that empty bank account into riches. That's what a true son of God should be able to do."

If you are the Son of God, then all the authority and glory of the earth should be yours. If you are a son of God, then being a Christian should be easy. It should be fun. A son of God doesn't need to work. He doesn't need to serve others. In fact, being a member of your church is a privilege and if the world can't see that, then they don't deserve to be Christians.

*"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here."* If you are a son of God, then he should protect you from everything. You shouldn't have to worry about sickness or injury. Old age or infirmity. You shouldn't have to deal with death at all. Because you are a son of God and that's beneath you.

The thing is though, we do have to deal with all those things. Discomfort, sadness, hunger, poverty, rejection, persecution, thankless labor, sickness, injury, old age, and death. All of it.

And it's so tempting to doubt God because of it. "I'm your son, God. Why is this happening to me? Are you there? Do you care? This isn't how sons of God should have to live."

And yet, it is. Because God didn't promise to always feed us bread. Only to feed us with his Word. And God never promised to give us authority and power. Only that we should serve him. And God never promised that we would never suffer. Only that he has a plan and we shouldn't put that plan to the test.

Because that plan will one day give us all those things. It will give us a place where there is no hunger or thirst. No mourning or sickness or pain. For the old order of things will pass away. And we will shine with glory as sons of God in the kingdom of our God forever.

That day is coming. I promise you that. It's coming because our Lord faced those temptations of the devil and did not succumb to them. He faced the same temptations that Adam faced. The same temptations that the Israelites faced. The same temptations that we all face. And he remained faithful.

Not just in that moment, but throughout his life. The final verse of the Gospel lesson says a lot: "*He departed from him until an opportune time.*" Do you know what that means?

It means the temptations never ended. This wasn't a one-time duel with the devil. This was a daily, continual assault from the father of lies. All the way up until the day of his passion.

When he knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane, tempted to reject his Father's will. But instead prayed, "*Not my will, but thine be done.*" When he stood before the Sanhedrin, tempted to open his mouth and refute all their lies. But instead remained silent, like a sheep led to the slaughter. When he hung nailed to a cross, tempted by the thief beside him to save himself like he had saved others. But instead declared "*It is finished,*" and gave up his spirit.

Through every temptation the devil could throw at him, he remained faithful to his Father's will. He was not just A son of God. He was THE Son of God. The only-begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And he gives that perfect life to us. That we might know the inheritance of God's sons. That we might know the same resurrection from the dead that he himself received. That we might live in the glory of his presence.

Who is the Son of God? Jesus, of course. But so are you. And by faith in his work. By baptism into his name. By feasting on his Body and Blood. He gives you victory over sin, death, and the devil this day. Amen.