Facing Temptation

Temptation offers us the opportunity for faithfulness.

- In today’s gospel, Jesus goes to the desert to pray. We tell this story, but for young children we focus on the Old Testament story of Adam and Eve.
- In our culture, the weeks before Easter—unlike the weeks before Christmas—have no urgency or significance. We can help young children perceive Lent in its Christian context, as a season of preparation for Easter.
- In today’s session, we begin our exploration of Lent, of the story of Adam and Eve and of the story of Jesus in the desert.

Question of the Week
The devil tempts Jesus to power, possessions and pride. What are the worst temptations for you?

Core Session
- Getting Started (clay)
- Old Testament Story: God Takes Clay (clay)
- Story-Review Game
- Praying Together (clay)

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Exploration Center: Lent (various crosses, Lenten vestments or purple napkins or ribbons, sticks and purple yarn)
- Info: Lenten Prayers
- Info: Young Children and the Lectionary
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
- More about Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- Liturgy Link: The Season of Lent/ Ash Wednesday
- The World of the Bible: The Devil, Satan

Scriptures
Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-24
Matthew 4:1-11
**Getting Started (5-15 minutes)**

Use old shirts or smocks to protect Sunday clothes. Give each child a lump of clay. Most children will knead, squeeze and shape without help!

After 5 minutes, invite the children to put their clay into bags to take home. Then, take one lump of clay and say, “I’m going to use clay to tell today’s story.”

**Old Testament Story (5-10 minutes)**

**God Takes Clay**

*Story Focus: Clay and cloth provide a visual focus for today’s story. You will use the clay to shape the figures of a man and a woman; the green cloth will represent the garden of Eden.*

When the whole world was just water and mud and clay, God took some of the mud and clay and made a man. *(Form part of the clay lump into a rough human figure.)*

Then God breathed the breath of life into the man. *(Cup the clay man in your hands; invite the children to blow breath onto the man. As children blow, repeat, “God breathed the breath of life into the man.”)* The man said, “Thank you, God! It is good to be alive!”

Now God planted a beautiful garden. *(Use graceful gestures to spread the cloth in swirls and folds before you; encourage the children to join you.)* God filled the garden with bright flowers, soft grass and fruitful trees. God put the man into the garden. *(Set the clay man gently onto the cloth.)*

The man said, “Thank you, God! This garden is so good to see!”

But God said, “It is not good for you to be alone! I will make you a friend.”

So God made animals. God made singing birds, sleek tigers and small mice. God brought the animals to the man. “What will you name them?” asked God.

The man named each animal. “Bird. Tiger. Mouse.” *(Invite the children to add other animal names.)*

The man loved the animals, and the animals loved the man. But God said, “You need a friend who is human, like you.”

The man fell asleep. God made a woman. *(Form the rest of the clay lump into a rough human figure. Invite the children to blow breath onto the woman.)* The woman said, “Thank you, God! It is so good to be alive!”

God brought the woman to the man. The man said, “Thank you, God. This is my friend and partner!”

The woman said, “Thank you, God. This is my friend and partner!” And the man and the woman lived together in God’s garden.

**Story-Review Game (10-20 minutes)**

**God’s Creation**

Stand in a circle. Help children name the animals that God made. Invite children to pretend to be each animal named. For example, you might invite children to move like birds. Some children may flap their arms; others might call out bird noises. Switch animals every minute or so.

If you join in the movements yourself, most of the children will imitate what you do. Instead you might describe the responses you see the children make; for example, “I see Tina hopping like a bird.”

**Praying Together (5 minutes)**

Gather around the clay figures from today’s story. Say:

- The man says, “Thank you, God!”
- The woman says, “God, it’s good to be alive!”
- What do you want to say to God this morning?

Close by praying:

- Thank you, God, for making us alive. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for each one of us: (name each child). Amen.

**Note:** If you use *At Home with the Good News*, distribute this week’s paper to the children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.
**Discover the Good News**  
**(5-10 minutes)**

In today’s *Discover the Good News* you’ll find a simple version of today’s Bible story.

You will also find a simple game of naming the animals paired with a song praising God. Help children sing the song, set to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell.” Invite them to point out the animals and name them. Ask:
- What sounds do these animals make?
- What other animals can they name?

**Singing Together**  
**(5-10 minutes)**

From *Singing the Good News*, sing together:
- “The Lord Planted a Garden” (p. 33 of the songbook, also available as an MP3)

**Note:** To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on *Singing the Good News*.

You can also sing a Lenten hymn such as the refrain of “All glory, laud, and honor” (#154, *The Hymnal 1982* or #30, *We Sing of God*).

You can also sing this song to the tune of the “Farmer in the Dell”:

\[
O \text{ sing and praise our God,}  
O \text{ sing and praise our God,}  
Let's name the animals,  
And sing and praise our God.  
\]

After singing the song through two or three times, you can play a musical game by following these directions:
- At the third line, pause after the words, “Let’s name the...” Invite children to name an animal, for example, a kitty cat or an elephant.
- After the verse is finished, children can move and make noise in imitation of the animal named.
- Repeat with a new verse and a new animal.

**Exploration Center**  
**(10-25 minutes)**

Lent

Children explore materials used of Lenten worship in a Lenten center.

*Activity Soundtrack:* Play Johnson’s “My Sisters and Brothers.” (Open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.)

Place the sticks and yarn, the crosses and the Lenten cloths on a work surface. Show children the materials. Say:
- This is the season of Lent. Lent is a time we pay special attention to the cross of Jesus. (*Show children the various crosses.*)
- We can make crosses, too. (*Hold two sticks in the shape of a cross. Put them down. Then pick up two more sticks and wind yarn around them to make a cross that stays together.*)
- You might see cloths of this color when you go into church. (*Show children the Lenten vestments or the colored napkins.*)

Invite children to take turns using the materials of the center. We recommend letting two or three children use the center together. (See a helpful article called Learning Centers, Part 1 attached to this document.)

**Lenten Prayers**

Throughout the season of Lent, you may want to incorporate liturgical prayers together with the more informal prayers we suggest. For example, you could begin each prayer time by singing the refrain of “All glory, laud, and honor” as suggested in today’s Music. You may follow this by helping the children pray together the Kyrie Eleison:

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\text{Lord, have mercy.}  
\text{Christ, have mercy.}  
\text{Lord, have mercy.}  
\]
Young Children and the Lectionary

We generally focus only on the gospel story with young children, who benefit from a session strongly focused on one story, one theme. However, the lectionary for Lent in Year A offers an unusual opportunity to hear significant Old Testament stories that, taken together, set the story of Jesus in the context of Old Testament history and covenants. Therefore several sessions of Lent will focus on beloved stories of the Old Testament, such as today’s story of Adam and Eve.

Today we only briefly visit the gospel story to help children understand the place of the desert in Jewish and Christian tradition. The desert was both a difficult, dangerous place and the place that Israel remembered as the place where God chose them, cared for them and called them to their ministry for all the world.

In today’s gospel, Jesus seeks out the desert at the bidding of God to reflect on God’s call and to prepare himself for ministry to God’s people. This is our Lenten calling, too, to prepare ourselves for ministry at God’s bidding. One way to help young children understand the setting of this story is by sharing with them one of Byrd Baylor’s beautiful picture books that celebrates the special beauty of the desert.

We recommend: Desert Voices by Byrd Baylor. Illustrated by Peter Parnall. (New York: Scribner, 1981). Baylor gives voice to 10 unusual creatures of the desert, such as the cactus wren: On the hottest summer afternoons when desert creatures look for shade and stay close to the earth and keep their voices low, I sit high on a cactus and fling my loud ringing trill out to the sun…

Where You’ll Find Everything Else

- Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
  - A printable version of today’s Old Testament Story: God Takes Clay, to use in the session or to send home with—or e-mail to—children and their parents.
  - A child friendly version of today’s lectionary Gospel Story: Jesus in the Desert.
  - A list of Animal Names and signature actions for use in today’s Story-Review Game.
  - A helpful article for catechists on Learning Centers.
  - A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.
- Open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Spring-A’s Models of the Faith.
  - A printable article for catechists titled First Impressions, which offers practical helps for experiencing and teaching about fine art.
  - Printable articles for catechists and/or families exploring Lent and Ash Wednesday and Keeping Lent in Your Household.
  - The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings remind us of the familiar cycle of temptation, fall, forgiveness and empowerment. In Genesis, Adam and Eve, who have been given all good things from God, crave more and give in to temptation. Paul announces to the Romans that the gift of grace in Jesus Christ overcomes the condemnation of sin. In the gospel, Jesus sees through the tempter’s lures and resists, using the power of God’s word.

**Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7**

God placed a prohibition on the tree “of the knowledge of good and evil” (v. 17), which represents the wisdom of conscience that comes not intellectually but by experience. Adam and Eve sought independence, the freedom to define for themselves what was good and what was evil apart from God’s wisdom.

Chapter 3 recounts the rebellion against God’s prohibition. The temptation progresses from doubt about what God has said, through suspicion of God’s motive, to awareness of the possibility of independence. The primary sin here is disobedience, which leads to the disordering of all relationships—with one’s own body, with God, with one another, with nature, within families and within societies.

**Romans 5:12-19**

In this rather complicated passage, Paul deals with the universal human condition of sin and death and its relationship to the gift of grace. In Jewish philosophical circles, speculations were current about the “first man,” Adam, and the implications of his acts for all humanity and about the “last man,” expected at the end of the age. Paul uses this material as background for comparing Adam and Christ.

In verses 15-17, the comparison becomes a contrast, for the trespass of Adam is outweighed by the superabundant free gift of grace. They are virtually in different dimensions. The free gift of righteousness, a right relationship, does not merely undo sin and death and return humanity to Eden, but offers incomparable grace and life. The role of the law was to point out the measureless mercy of God by measuring sinfulness.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

Matthew’s account of Jesus’ temptation works out the implications of the voice present at Jesus’ baptism, declaring him to be the Son of God. For Matthew, sonship is manifested in perfect obedience to the Father’s will. Israel was also called the son of God, but failed to obey God despite the time of formation in the wilderness. Now Jesus, the true Israel, is led into the wilderness to be tested. Like Moses and Elijah, he fasts for 40 days and nights.

The mountain and the ministry of angels also point to Jesus as Messiah. He is tempted to doubt his sonship (“If you are the Son of God…”; vv. 3-5) and to use the power of that relationship for selfish ends. From the narrative of Israel’s testing in the wilderness, Jesus responds to the tempter, affirming his complete trust and obedience to his Father. Jesus demonstrates the kind of obedience that he teaches his disciples and shows us how to respond to our own temptations.

**Reflection**

What’s really important? In today’s gospel, Jesus models how to choose the greatest good, facing bewildering options. His temptations are closely linked to his baptism. If God has called him beloved, will he act out of that affirmation? Or will he rely on the “quick fix,” smoothly offered by the devil?

It’s a real choice; hence, the drama. An older translation of Matthew 4:2 charmingly describes how forty days and nights of fasting have left Jesus: “He was afterward a hungered.” Despite gnawing stomach pains, he knows he could eat to satiety and still be unfulfilled—there’s more to hunger than food can satisfy. Later, he would feed five thousand, but he refuses to use his power only for himself.

The next temptation is trickier: a chance to demonstrate God’s power to people who might be moved by it. The tower in Jerusalem could be seen by crowds—what a dramatic way to convert them! Ironically, Jesus would be lifted high, seen by Jerusalem crowds, but less dramatically. If Jesus is the beloved, he must believe God’s way of saving people, slow and excruciating as it might seem. Much as he wanted to rescue his people from Roman oppression, he would bring them into his kingdom by a different door, marked trust.
The Scriptures and the Catechism

As Lent begins, we recall that our Christian conversion depends on the gift of our freedom to make choices (CCC, #1730–48). The two-edged sword of our freedom is that we have the ability to choose for good or for evil. Human history has too often been the history of sinful choices (CCC, #1427–39). But Jesus shows us the way to authentic Christian discipleship by his choice to be a faithful and obedient son (CCC, #538–40).

Liturgy Link

The Season of Lent

The word Lent comes from a word meaning springtime. In agricultural societies, such as those of the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe (until quite recently), early spring was the time when food was in the shortest supply.

Most domestic animals, except for breeding stock, were slaughtered in the fall because not enough feed could be stored for all animals to survive the winter. By early spring, although fish was still available, supplies of frozen or salted meat began to run out. Eggs and milk were also scarce, and the warming weather threatened to spoil the remainder.

During this period of scarcity, the winter grain crops grew and animals gave birth and raised their young. The end of this period was often celebrated with a feast offering the first fruits of the spring harvest to God. The Jewish Passover incorporates elements of this feast: a shepherd’s sacrifice and feast of young lambs and a farmer’s feast of unleavened bread made from the spring barley harvest. Because of the connection between the occurrence of the Passover and the resurrection, Easter has always been set in this context of springtime.

Ash Wednesday

“You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19b). How scary these words are. We live in a culture that has tried desperately to avoid confronting death. We idolize youth, beauty and health and are terrified of growing old. We refuse to speak of death and remove the experience of death as far from us as we can. We have forgotten the Christian truth that death is an essential part of life.

Ash Wednesday is a day that we need to honor. Christ’s own example shows us that our life and death are connected to something greater. Death is not the end but only the transformation to a new way of relating to God—a relation that is not limited by our bodily existence. The crossed ashes we receive on our foreheads are a stark reminder both of our death and its connection to the life-giving cross of Christ.

Now is the time to take stock of our lives and ask the most challenging question of all. How would my life change if I were to die today?

The World of the Bible

The Devil, Satan

In the earlier books of the Bible (especially Job), the devil is depicted as “the satan” or accuser or tempter. He is a kind of legal prosecutor in the divine assembly who questions the sincerity of human faith.

After the Babylonian exile, when the Jews began to stress that God was the only divine being who is both transcendent and supremely good, they found it difficult to account for evil in the world.

Gradually they developed the figure of the devil or Satan as an evil spirit who is subordinate to God but hostile to God’s plans for human community and creation. Satan struggles with God for domination or lordship over the earth, and tempts humans from following God’s ways.

Jesus’ confrontation with the devil at the outset of his public ministry is a preview of the ensuing struggle of Jesus against the dominating power of evil. By tempting Jesus to be something less than the divine son that God has proclaimed him to be at baptism, the devil seeks to avoid the triumph of good over evil that will occur through Jesus.