**FIRST SUNDAY 2022 SERIES IN LUKE 2nd Jan 2022**

**Following Jesus on Mission**

*And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.*

*The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”*

*And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”*

*And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

*And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)*

Luke, like all the gospel writers is keen to establish Jesus’ identity.

Because knowing who Jesus is makes a difference.

It will help us understand how our lives will change when we encounter Him

And what we are called to do in response to Him

This is no more true than here in this opening scene in the wilderness.

So far, Luke has recorded for us – after much personal and extensive study…

the facts surrounding the Incarnation

The miraculous birth of John the Baptist…

a cousin of Jesus and Prophet predicted from of old to

prepare the way for the Messiah.

The angelic appearance to Mary and her incredible response

The actual birth of Jesus

The arrival of the angelic Host calling the Shepherds to witness…

In fact be the first witnesses to this earth shattering event

and their subsequent visit and response of Joy!

And then on the 8th day, the day of Jesus circumcision

and presentation to God in the temple…

The day when the mother was purified according to Jewish law…

Luke tells us about the encounter with Simeon and Anna – the prophetess…

Both of whom recognise Jesus as the coming Messiah and fulfilment of

God’s promise to intervene and rescue and restore His people.

Skipping a few years, including the story of the magi from the East (that is left to Matthew to tell)…

Jesus is now 12 – and as was the custom the family head to Jerusalem for Passover

This was a special year. At 12, every Jewish boy became a “son (or servant)

of the Law”, old enough to start serving God.

It was Jesus’ coming of age or Bar Mitzvah.

The time when a child could begin his training to become a Rabbi.

(although he needed to be able to quote it from memory to do so!)

But little is said about this, instead we hear about the return home when the parents realise they have left Jesus behind.

Anxiously they go back to Jerusalem in search for Him,

but when they find him Jesus responds: *“Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” Luke 2:49*

To which Luke Comments – They didn’t understand!

But who Would!? PAUSE

It’s now 18 years later.

It feels like the real story is about to begin.

And in preparation the focus shifts to John the Baptist

He is by the banks of the Jordan,

calling people to be baptised as a symbol of their repentance,

and in preparation for the coming Messiah.

And into this scene comes the now 30 year old Jesus who steps on to the public stage by declaring his desire to be baptised.

The Baptiser acknowledges who he is, and despite his significant reticence baptises Jesus and boldly states *“This is the one who is to come. Gods’ promised rescuer is now here!*

Time and time again in the narrative so far, Luke has been telling us this very fact!

Elizabeth and Zechariah their son was to *“make ready a people prepared for the Lord”*

Mary was told by the angel that her Son *shall be called Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will* reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Luk 1:31-33

And the Shepherds were told *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11*

When Jesus was presented in the temple Simeon recognised him immediately and as a result was now ready to die, because *my eyes have seen your salvation Luk 2:30*

And when he came to John to be baptised, the Spirit himself gave witness to who he was.  *…the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Luk 3:21-22)*

And then, just to finish all this off, after the baptism and endorsement of John, Luke gives us the Genealogy of Jesus introducing it with this wonderfully cryptic line: *Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, (Luk 3:23)*

Clearly, Luke is very keen to help us understand who Jesus **really** is…

And **why** Jesus has come!

For Luke – this is of vital importance.

When we recognise who Jesus is – The importance of our response will be clear!

Jesus does not allow anyone to meet him and walk away unaffected.

Those who respond positively are transformed,

their lives are turned upside down and they are never the same again.

Those who don’t – are shown to be out of step with God

and miss out on all God wants for them.

From the opening stories

To the account of Jesus’ first act of public ministry (next week) this is made clear.

We have not truly met Jesus – unless we are radically changed!

For this reason - Luke is at pains to help us understand - Jesus is no ordinary man.

Already we could start to make quite a list.

Why not grab a pen and do it yourself after this message.

Or you could even pause the video and do it now!

Read through the opening chapters and list all the ways Luke tries to help us understand who Jesus really is.

 Look at all the characters we have met so far. How do they helps us?

I am sure you will begin to see that Jesus is

Gods’ promised Messiah, the Saviour, a King…

Son of God, and yet, very much a man!

 Just to get you started! PAUSE

As I engage with a whole variety of people who do not **get** the Christian faith…

One told me the other day he is basically a good person and believes there is a God

– so nothing else is needed! Right?

I wanted to say how very wrong he was – but couldn’t work out how!

Or someone else I am speaking with regularly. He is desperate to find a philosophy to make life work. But refuses to explore Christian faith.

Now I can’t yet work out why he is so resistant…

but I do find myself wondering what he thinks of Jesus himself?!

Luke knows that what we know about Jesus is vital. It changes everything.

And so now in Chapter 4 as we begin to get stuck into the life and ministry of Jesus, Luke continues to establish the credentials of Jesus

by telling us of His wilderness experience! PAUSE

Recently I spent some time in a wilderness….

Well I am not sure Hobart is a wilderness… but…

I was isolated from my normal surroundings

I was separated from my family and friends

I was removed from “doing” all the normal things that give meaning…

This is part of the gift of being on a retreat…

It’s not so much a holiday – as a time to reflect on what matters.

“Who am I, and what is important?

It brings to the surface our deepest feelings, core desires and fundamental beliefs about ourselves.

This is what was going on in the 3 temptations Jesus faced:

The very depths of Jesus’ self understanding were confronted.

And we see in his response – his deep knowledge that he is God’s beloved Son.

And because he knows this – it affects everything. It is enough!

1st temptation:

**We tend to believe that what you do defines your value!**

*The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”  And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”*

Our job, our busyness, our productivity, our activity…

These are the things that help me feel valuable. Worthwhile. Loveable.

We know this temptation – although for many of us it is not a temptation...
It is just so normal, so much a part of our society, our social interaction…

that we hardly notice!

It is revealed when we ask people what they do?

And when we respond with “busy” when asked how we are?

We face it when we retire, or become retrenched, or are forced to take extended leave because of sickness, lockdowns or for other reason.

And those who can’t work, can’t do stuff for others – this can be a constant struggle. Because our value – is determined by what we do!

 Our society values us by what we do!

But it wasn’t true for Jesus.

“Prove you are the Son of God by turning this stone into bread!” says the tempter.

No need – say’s Jesus - I know who I am.

I don’t need to do anything to prove it to anybody. Not you and not even to myself!

When I was having my own little wilderness experience – I tasted this struggle.

I realised that my ability to do things for others helps me feel good about myself.

And when I don’t – I can’t...

What then?

What does God think of me?

And what do I think about myself?

If we are honest, my guess is that we all struggle with this…

But Jesus didn’t. He was secure in the knowledge of who he was:-

God’s precious Son!

After all it was only yesterday when he had heard his Father say: *“You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased” 3:22*

This is also God’s word to you?

Whoever you are, irrespective of what you do or don’t do

When God calls you into His family – this is His word to you.

“You are my precious daughter, my beloved son. I love you dearly.

I am delighted in you and with you.”

Angels throw a party when you joined my family. (Luke 15)

And I sing and dance for joy whenever I think of you (Zephaniah 3:17)

Can you dare to believe this?

Because if you know this…

then you will know that your value is not determined by what you do!

2nd Temptation:

**Who we are is determined by… and revealed in what we worship**

*And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.  If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”  And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”  V.5-8*

*“If you worship me – it will all be yours!”* This is an incredibly powerful temptation.

A temptation – in one form or another - we are faced with all the time!

If you buy this item – you will be happy

If follow these principles - you will be successful.

If you marry this person – you will be fulfilled.

If you just invest in “this” – then what you wish for will be yours!

This is the essence of worship.

It is to seek fulfilment, meaning or satisfaction in something.

It is to give honour and due to a thing – expecting benefit or blessing as a result.

And we spend out lives worshipping those things which we think will help us get what we want.

And what we spend our time worshipping – money, or success, or significance, or relationships – ends up shaping us, defining us, creating us.

Who or what we worship determines - and reveals - who we are.

So when Jesus is offered an easy way to fame, fortune and success…

all that was required of Him was to worship the tempter…

Because He knew who He was.

Because He knew what He wanted to be…

a loved and obedient child of His Father…

His response was automatic and obvious.

“I will worship God and God alone.”

I wonder – what would it mean for you in 2022 to surrender all of your longings and desires to God –

What would it mean for you to worship Him and Him alone?

For who we are is determined by and revealed in who or what we worship!

3rd Temptation

**What God thinks of you is evident by how life goes**

*And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”  9-12*

Oh we know this temptation so well – don’t we?!

When things are tough, something goes wrong, tragedy strikes…

“What have I done to deserve this?

God why are you punishing me?

Clearly I haven’t done... (insert a whole range of things here – prayer religious practices, charity, etc!)

This was how Job’s friends thought…

as they argued that His suffering were obviously because of some sin!

It’s the excuse so many people use to not believe in God: –

“how can a good God allow such bad things to happen?

 Assuming that God’s main job is to make our lives better!

And its what we so easily believe when life does not work out the way we want.

Essentially it boils down to “Clearly God is not very happy with me right now!

Because if he loved me, or I was living in a way that pleased him…

life would be better, nicer, easier than this!”

 I would have the life I want!

This is the temptation thrown at Jesus here.

“If God loves you – he will protect you, look after you, keep you safe.

So jump of this building to prove it is true!”

To which Jesus effectively says – “No need. I know it already!” PAUSE

The question this passages asks today, is – do you?

John tells us in his first letter: *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1Jn 3:1)*

God loves us completely, unconditionally, lavishly.

 But do you know this?

John goes on in that same passage: *The reason why the world does not know this is that it did not know him.*

When we don’t truly know God…

We forget how much He loves us.

How extravagantly and generously he is devoted to us.

And as a result we can easily believe that what God thinks of us

is reflected in what is happening in our lives.

It becomes easy to believe the tempters lie that bad things prove otherwise.

When we believe this lie – its because we don’t really know the Father’s love.

PAUSE

Can you remember when you first fell in love, or first held your own child, or first realised your deep love for your parents

That love for another is nothing compared to God’s love for you.

And interesting isn’t it that your love for your child

happens before they have or can do anything!

Jesus said: *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. (John 15:9)*

How Jesus responded to the temptations reflected that He know this deeply.

He knew he was – the beloved Son of the Almighty Father God.

The Question I want to leave you with, as we enter 2022…

 with all its fears and uncertainties, surprises and successes…

Do you?

Do you know you are the much loved child of the Almighty Father God?

Do you know it in the very core of your being

so that it empowers you to follow Him whatever it costs

It is reflected in who or what you worship

Or is not shaken by difficult events,

Because God wants you to know this today – and in all the days ahead…

whatever the future holds!

Can I encourage you after the video has ended.

Take some time to sit quietly.

Reflect on the Father’s love for you

Make a list of all the reasons why you can know this is true

And then start to consider the difference knowing this could make in all the different things you do, relationships you have, decisions you make.

When you encounter Jesus – He changes you.

 Not least because you come to experience the unconditional love of the Father God