

# Tempted

*Matthew 4:1-11; Mark  
1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13*

*Year A Lent 1 ; Year C Lent  
1 ; Year C Epiphany 3  
(Catholic)*

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part    ▲ = medium sized part    ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲		▲		▲
▲	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲		▲		●
▲	<b>Judas</b> - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		●		■	●
▲	<b>Joanna</b> - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus		▲		▲	●
▲	<b>Marcus</b> - a Roman official who's part of a plot to foment a worldwide revolt against the Empire		■			
●	<b>Man</b> - a poor farmer on the verge of poverty			▲		
●	<b>Woman</b> - the farmer's wife			▲		
▲	<b>Jesus</b>					▲

## Scene 1

James , John

*{James and John approach an isolated farm.}}*

**James** Please let there be food! Please let there be food! Please, please, please let there be food!

**John** Don't get your hopes up. Don't forget: it's going to be a coin toss.

**James** I know: fast or feast. But it's been three days of fasting now, so we must be due for a feast!

**John** I don't think coins work that way, though I sure hope God does.

**James** How amazing is it that the rabbi's called it every day? For the past two weeks, it's happened exactly the way he said it would: we approach the nearest farmhouse, and they either load us up with more than we could eat in two parties much less one, or they give us absolutely nothing.

**John** I'm not sure which outcome to hope for some days. The parties are great, but I love just studying the scriptures and hearing stories on the days we fast.

**James** I'm all for the teaching - just not four days in a row!

*{They reach the door of the farmhouse.}*

**John** Well, we'll find out what today holds for us in a minute. *[knocking on the door]* Hello? Is anybody home?

## Scene 2

Joanna , Judas , Marcus

*{Meanwhile, Judas and Joanna are meeting with a Roman official in the town.}*

**Judas** Incredible!

**Joanna** I've heard rumors about groups like yours, but I never gave them much credence.

**Marcus** I can understand why we'd be hard to believe. We're a new thing in the world. We hope to be the *future* of the world.

**Judas** I just want to make sure I have this straight. You would help us overthrow Roman rule?

**Marcus** Correct.

- Judas** And then you'd leave us alone afterward?
- Marcus** You'd be expected to contribute troops to help with other revolts, and you'd pay some tax, but very little of both, as I laid out earlier.
- Joanna** How is this even possible? It seems too easy.
- Marcus** I don't want to deceive you: It *won't* be easy. The odds are always going to be against any revolt. All we can do is improve them as much as we can by not being as greedy about the rewards. You could call us the "second greediest option." We don't want the power and wealth of the Caesars or Pharaohs of the past. We just want a fair portion, and we're willing to share it with others. You two, for example.
- Judas** Are you offering us high positions in your new empire if we join you?
- Marcus** No, I can't make any promises about the future. What I *can* offer you - both of you - is a wider stage on which to demonstrate your talents and pursue your ambitions. *[to Judas]* I've done my homework on your group, and I suspect that if you win your freedom all by yourself, entirely through this Messiah of yours, it's not you who'll sit at his right hand when he rules, even though I believe you're his most valuable organizer. *[to Joanna]* And no woman will ever wield any significant power in your society.
- Joanna** I think I've managed to effect a fair amount of change in my time.
- Marcus** Yes, I know about that, too. You and your husband have moderated Herod's policies quite a bit, but always on the sly, in the background, constantly having to fight against the current of his excesses. Wouldn't you rather *be* the current?
- Joanna** So you believe in the principles that my husband and I have tried to fight for? That the good of the people should come first? That the administration of a nation should be rational and compassionate?
- Marcus** I'll be honest again: We do not! We don't believe in anything, and that's what's going to make this rebellion work. We aren't asking people to rally behind a single leader or philosophy or god. All we're asking is that they join us, for whatever their own reasons might be. Most, like you, will be in it for the good of their people. Others, frankly, are joining because *they* want to be the tyrants that lord it over their people or their neighbors. The goals don't matter to us. All that matters is creating such a broad revolt that the Empire won't know where to start stamping it out.

### Scene 3

James , John , Man , Woman

*{Back to John and James at the farm.}*

**Man** Can I help you?

**John** We're a group of about twenty camping in the desert today, and we were wondering if you had any food to spare.

**Man** *[sadly]* I'm sorry, but we have nothing.

**James** *[ruefully]* Fast! I knew it!

**Man** Pardon me?

**John** It's nothing. We've been without food for a while.

**Man** Believe me, I wish I could help you. There was a time when I could have, but you can see our fields are bare, and our barns empty. In fact, we're about to abandon the farm.

**James** Wow. We're sorry for your troubles. We won't take up any more of your time.

*{The man's wife comes to the door as James and John are turning to go.}*

**Woman** *[to James and John]* Wait! *[whispers to the man]* We do have *some* food. Invite them in!

**Man** *[to James and John]* Would you excuse us for a moment? *[privately to his wife]* What are you thinking? That might be our last real meal before we have to become beggars!

**Woman** We always shared in the good times. Why should we stop now?

**Man** But it's not even enough to fill two stomachs, much less four, much less twenty!

**Woman** When we saw those men coming up the path, you didn't want to open the door to them at first, because you knew they could only be coming to ask us for something we didn't have to give. And yet, you did. Why?

**Man** *[sighing]* I didn't want to live my life behind closed doors, no matter how bad things got for us.

**Woman** I feel the same way. That's why I married the man I married.

*{They return to the door.}*

**Man** Please, come in and share what we have. It's only a few mealcakes, but you're welcome to them.

**James** Thanks! I'm sure God will bless you for this.

**John** Hold on. *[to the couple]* Would you excuse us for a moment?

*{John and James step aside to talk privately.}*

**James** What's wrong?

**John** I don't think we should eat.

**James** Why not? We can't bring it back to the group. Everyone would get just a bite, and that would probably only make them all hungrier in the long run.

**John** *[hesitantly]* No, I see that.

**James** Are you thinking about these poor people? They want to share with us, and it's a good deed, and God will reward them for it. We should let them do the good thing they want to do.

**John** It's not that, either.

**James** The rabbi never said we couldn't eat whatever turned up, you know. He just predicted what we'd find each day.

**John** No, you're right about that, but still...Let me see if I can explain it. *[after a pause]* We've been living a certain way these past two weeks. It seems to be about the bigness of things, the extremes of life. We don't just eat; we party. We don't just study; we fast. It hasn't always been like this, and maybe we'll go back to living normally soon, but for now, the rabbi seems to want us to experience this new way, and I don't want to go against it even if he wouldn't mind. Do you understand?

**James** Yeah, I guess so.

## Scene 4

Joanna , Judas

*{Judas and Joanna, two people - perhaps the only people among the disciples - who are comfortable with intellectual argument, debate Marcus's proposal as they return to the camp.}*

- Judas** I think it's a no-brainer. I'm sure the taxes will end up being higher than he says - they won't be able to resist asking for more - but I'm not sure it's even possible for them to get high enough to outweigh the benefits of getting their military help.
- Joanna** You're forgetting there's another cost. We'll have to fight side-by-side with groups we might find odious. Don't forget what he said about the different goals of some of the other groups.
- Judas** That's a good point, but it's kind of on a different plane, isn't it? The rabbi might rule out our joining this group for that reason alone, or it might be fine with him, and either way, that will settle the moral question absolutely. Our only duty is to accurately report the military math to him, and I think that's pretty clear cut.
- Joanna** Is it?
- Judas** Isn't it? Our troops plus their troops is greater than our troops alone. At least the last time I checked the laws of arithmetic.
- Joanna** What about the laws of psychology? If we get a lot of outsiders coming in to fight for us, especially if some of them are morally unsavory like your friend warned us, a lot of our people are not going to want to fight by their sides at all. Our troops plus their troops might be less than our troops alone.
- Judas** I'll admit we'll lose some recruits if we bring in outside help, but we'll clearly gain many more who'll join a fight they think they can win. Numbers tend to breed numbers.
- Joanna** You don't know that for sure. It's an awful risk to take based on a hypothesis about how people will react.
- Judas** But your concerns are also based on a hypothesis about how people will react, and I'm not sure I trust your judgment on this one.
- Joanna** Why not? Because I'm a woman?
- Judas** No! Well, maybe indirectly. It's because of your strong feelings about the moral issue. No matter how good the military math was, you'd still vote against joining this group for moral reasons. Which you're entitled to do, but are you sure you're not fudging the math to make it come out the same way as the morals?

**Joanna** *[after a pause]* Okay, you might be right about that. How do we decide between our two hypotheses, then?

**Judas** I guess the surest way would be to ask what actually happens in cases like this throughout history, but I just don't know enough about the history of revolts to say.

**Joanna** So...then how could *you* be so sure about *your* math?

**Judas** *[after a long pause, with a laugh]* Ha! You got me. I guess I can't be sure, either!

**Joanna** But you were at one point. Why?

**Judas** I don't know. Just overly optimistic, I suppose.

**Joanna** *[gently]* Could it be that you had your own emotional bias?

**Judas** *[earnestly]* I can't imagine what it might have been, but if I've missed something, please enlighten me.

**Joanna** *[meekly and carefully, not wanting to offend]* I was thinking about how you and I would probably come into a lot more power if we joined his revolt than if we won on our own. I know it affected me. If the moral issue hadn't been there, it might have pushed my math in the other direction. Could it have affected yours?

**Judas** *[after a long pause, quietly but lightheartedly]* Touchï½! I promise you I wasn't thinking about it directly, but of course: how could it *not* have affected me? What a treacherous road we walk!

**Joanna** Fortunately, we walk it together.

**Judas** Amen to that.

## Scene 5

James , Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas

*{Judas and Joanna get back to the camp.}*

**Judas** We're back with our report! Would you like to hear it now?

**Jesus** No, let's wait and talk during our next meal.

**Joanna** A meal? Does that mean John and James came back with food?

**John** No. Sorry.

**Jesus** We'll wait for the day when food does come, and discuss your findings all together. As for today, we'll continue our study of Moses.

**James** Rabbi? Before we start, can I ask you a question? John told me on our walk back that you have a secret trick for enduring long fasts. Is that true?

**Jesus** It is. I once fasted for forty consecutive days - right here in this desert, as a matter of fact - and believe me, I had to learn how to cope very quickly!

**James** *[unhappily]* I see. *[awkwardly]* Well, don't you think it's...a little unfair?

**Judas** What on earth are you talking about?

**James** *[awkwardly]* Well, if you're asking us to fast, when you have a trick for doing it more easily yourself...

**John** But that's because he is who he is. How could he not have powers beyond ours?

**Jesus** Actually, it's not beyond you. I could teach anybody how to do it.

**Judas** Really? So what's the secret?

**Jesus** You have to reach a state of deep meditation. That might sound difficult, but all it takes is time and solitude.

**Joanna** Where are you finding either? We're together all the time on this retreat.

**John** Are you slipping away late at night or early in the morning like you often do?

**Jesus** No, I've been keeping the same hours as everybody else. The truth is, I haven't tried doing the meditations at all.

**Judas** Why not?

**Jesus** Because it would be unfair! Just like James said. I didn't want to avoid the hunger I was asking you all to undergo. Of course, I didn't think we'd have four straight days of it!



**James** Hey, what if you taught us the trick? You said you could, right? Then it would be fair all around.

**Jesus** An excellent idea! *[to everybody]* What do you say? Shall we make that the lesson for today instead of Moses? *[everybody agrees]* Very well. Everybody find a comfortable spot to sit, and close your eyes. *[modulating his voice into a standard therapeutic tone]* We're going to start by emptying our minds of every thought: every desire, every frustration, every regret. Every plan, every hope, every calculation. Let nothing stand between you and Moment, between you and the Now...

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