

*One day as he was teaching the people in the temple area and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and scribes, together with the elders, approached him and said to him, "Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Or who is the one who gave you this authority?"*

Thus the Temple priests and rabbis confronted Jesus in Luke's Gospel. And even after the death of Jesus that same doubt lingered among the many who questioned his credentials as truly in line with the Moses of old – who led Israel out of Egypt into the future and set God's Law in stone on Mount Sinai.

In response to that doubt the Gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with overtures whereby the features of Jesus's early life are matched artfully by allusions to features of Moses's beginnings. I say artfully, even rhetorically, because that's the way people wrote history back then – as history with a halo effect. And let's face it. Isn't that true of so much modern history? Doesn't a researched biography of Winston Churchill present him as "canonized"?

And so there is a legend about a star heralding the birth of Moses that infiltrates the birth story of Jesus. The infant Moses escaped Pharaoh's decree to kill all Hebrew infant males; even as the infant Jesus escapes King Herod's massacre of Bethlehem's infant boys.

Moses leads Israelites out of the Red Sea and into a desert sojourn of forty years. Jesus rises out of the waters of the Jordan River and next we find him sojourning for forty days and nights in a desert. It is a highly imaginative "match" which in those days could very well credential Jesus as a new Moses or at least cause doubters to wonder.

Also notice how in today's Temptation story Jesus in responding to the devil always quotes directly from the writings of Moses, in which Jesus was obviously well versed.

Nor is this Temptation scene without its parallel to modern times. Who is the devil or diabolos? He is a trickster. He throws curveballs. He too can quote Scripture but in a perverted way. And his temptations fit our times: make and spend money, sometimes called bread, billions and trillions enough to keep up with the rapid production of ever new things "you need", to keep the arsenals thriving; bow down to the idols of the day; acquire enough power to last you a million years - beyond your demise when you won't need it; go to the extreme, high dive off the Temple wall, behave ever more dangerously, technology unbridled, test this new bomb; reduce travel to a split second – which of course is what a digital culture does.

And here's the more ominous of Jesus's replies echoing Moses: *Don't put God to a test* which finds an echo in *Don't tempt fate* or *Don't push too far* - to where even angels won't be able to save you.