



John Milton

Having been publicly acknowledged as God's "beloved Son," Jesus retires to the desert to meditate upon what it means to be the Messiah, about whose coming many conflicting opinions have been circulating among the Jews. Although a learned rabbi, Jesus possesses no knowledge beyond what is available to all human beings. Satan also takes a new interest in this favored "son of God" and seeks to learn what threat he constitutes. The poem consists of a debate between these two adversaries, each seeking the same understanding of precisely what mankind's Savior will do in a world where the way to success typically lies through "wealth . . . honour . . . arms . . . arts . . . Kingdom . . . Empire . . . life contemplative, / Or active, tended on by glory, or fame." By withstanding Satan's temptation to all such worldly paths, Jesus proves himself to be a perfect, unfallen man and consequently worthy to win back paradise for mankind. Repeatedly invited to take action—either to secure his kingdom or to prove himself deserving of the divine favor that has been shown him or simply to save his life—he resists, patiently suffering, withstanding, waiting. Yet he learns from his temptation, clarifying in his own mind what his mission on earth must be and the means to achieve it. For although Satan knows no more of his mission than he does himself, Satan points the way by offering the wrong goals or the wrong motives or the wrong means. Thus the Father of Lies against his will opens the way to salvation for human kind. (Summary by Thomas Copeland)

Read by Thomas A. Copeland. Total running time: 2:00:09

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