

Well, the beginning of today's Gospel reading is the first four verses of Luke's Gospel. In it, the writer explains why he is writing this Gospel. He addresses it to Theophilus, which literally means "lover of God". Scholars debate whether "Theophilus" is an individual or simply meant to be all those who love God, which of course includes us. I don't know that it matters. But, personally, I like to think of it as addressing all of us. So, today we begin by being assured of "the certainty of the teaching" we have received, and then, we skip over the stories of Jesus' birth and His baptism.

OK so, Jesus has gone home to Nazareth for the first time since His baptism. Nazareth - Mary and Joseph were born and raised there. Their families were from there. They were well known. Jesus is about thirty years old when we encounter Him in today's Gospel. He has spent time in the area around Jerusalem and in Galilee preaching in the synagogues. And now, He's back where he grew up.

He grew up as a carpenter's son. He was known to the people of His village as a carpenter, and I'm sure He was a good one. In many ways, He was probably taken for granted. But, when He comes back from his travels, He has acquired a bit of a reputation in Galilee. He's beginning to make a name for himself as a travelling preacher. Now He's the hometown boy who has done well. So, when He enters the synagogue that Saturday, they pass the scroll to Him. They want to hear Him preach.

So, He opens the scroll to a very specific place in the writings of Isaiah. Isaiah, the great prophet who describes in detail the signs of the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the one who will come to fulfill the hopes of thousands of years of history and prayer.

Can we imagine what they might have been thinking, hoping, when they heard Jesus read: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”? This was a description of what the Messiah was to do when he came to save and redeem God’s people.

Next, Luke writes: “Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, ‘Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.’” Can we imagine what happened when he said those words? Was there was silence? Was there was a feeling of awe and wonder, of possibility and hope?

Well, that’s where the story stops for us today. You’re going to have to come back next Sunday for the second part of the story. And both parts are important, because Jesus has proclaimed Himself as the Messiah, but how the good people of Nazareth respond may provide us with some insights into what we may face in spreading the Good News.

For now, let's consider just what Jesus is telling the people of Nazareth, and us, in His choice of Scripture: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism. If we backtrack a few chapters we find, "the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." He is the Son of God. And, He is "to bring glad tidings to the poor."

OK, "Glad tidings" are the Good News, the Gospel. OK, "to the poor..." Who are "the poor"? Well, the poor, in Hebrew are the *anawim*, the faithful ones, the people of God, - us -, and they, - we -, are to receive the glad tidings, the good news. The "poor" to the people of Israel at that time were "those who know their need for God." "Those who know their need for God." - That should include us today. It wasn't a matter of who was rich and who was poor in the way our world thinks of it. Consider...

There is a story told of a young couple just starting their married life. The young man said to his wife: "Someday, we're going to be rich." And, she looked at him and said, "Honey, we are already rich. Maybe someday we'll have some money." If we are open to the Good News that Jesus brings us, we are already rich. He will bring us the fullness of life. (The money part...well...no promises...)

So then, what about this “recovery of sight to the blind”, or “liberty to captives”, or “freedom to the oppressed”? We can go through life blindly looking for the meaning. When we find God and recognize our need for Him, our eyes are opened, we find meaning. We can be held captive by our own doubts or oppressed by the expectations of the world around us. We are set free when we turn to God and place our trust in Him.

There in Nazareth, in that synagogue, Jesus is saying, “You have found me, and I am the fullness of life. I am the Son of God.” God incarnate was standing right in front of them. And He is still with us. He hasn’t gone anywhere. He is with us here and now. In a few minutes He will be truly present on the altar. His love is with us, and His love brings healing, and His love is everlasting.

He invites us to believe in Him, to trust in Him, to follow Him. He was saying to the people of Nazareth and He says to us: We have God’s love, and when we give our love to God, He will show us the way, His way. It’s the way of compassion and understanding. It’s the way of peace and justice. It’s the way to eternal life. When we come forward to receive the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, so that we may become the Body of Christ in this world, Jesus is before us just as He was before the people in the synagogue in Nazareth. And, He invites us to accept Him and to follow Him. The choice is ours. Next week we’ll find out what the people of Nazareth chose....

3rd Sunday of OT C II
St. Andrew/St. Matthew