

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

See Luke 4:18

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,

and to proclaim liberty to captives.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21; L69C

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

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Reflecting on the Gospel

When embarking on an important work, task, or life choice, we often indicate so. Presidential candidates declare their candidacy in symbolically significant places. One proposes marriage to another in a meaningful way that is remembered. And special events like birthdays, baptisms, and anniversaries are marked by rituals. Afterward, we settle into routine. Luke does something similar when he begins his gospel. He opens with a four-verse prologue that is one long sentence in Greek! And the Greek he writes is florid, high in style, and reminiscent of classical Greek. After these four verses he descends from that style to the more common (*koinē*) Greek.



There are many things to note in this brief opening to the gospel, but it is significant that Luke says he is relying on the eyewitness of others, and thereby indicates that he was not an eyewitness himself. Otherwise, he might have said something like “and my own eyewitness.” But it is clear that he is at least a second-generation Christian, who has looked into this story and told it so the believer Theophilus (the name means “God-lover”) might have surety. And in fact, the word “surety” (*asphaleian* in Greek) concludes the first four-verse sentence in Greek, indicating its importance. By this emphasis on surety, even the modern reader recognizes that the story of Jesus is no mere myth. As Luke says later in Acts, “[T]his was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26; NABRE). The events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection really and truly happened.

But the church is not content to give us only the first four verses of the gospel on this Sunday. The second significant item to note is that we also read about Jesus’ preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth in chapter 4. Luke is intent to show that the Scriptures of old are fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus reads the prophet and proclaims that the message is fulfilled in their midst. The message will be Jesus’ guiding light. He will refer to it again when John the Baptist’s followers come to Jesus and ask if he is the one they should expect. Jesus causes the blind to see and proclaims glad tidings to the poor. In so doing, he is the fulfillment of the hopes and expectations of the prophets, for the Spirit of the Lord is upon him.

Living the Paschal Mystery

How do we imagine the ministry of Jesus? What was it that he did? We know it ultimately ended in his passion, death, and resurrection, but what about his work among the people? Today’s gospel reading, with Jesus quoting the prophet, gives us an indication as to what occupied the mind and thoughts of Jesus as he performed his ministry. He brings glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. This was the message of the prophet and to use a modern term, it is the mission statement of Jesus’ ministry. If we want to be his followers, it is up to us to take on this mission statement as well. This ministry is in conformity with the prophets. It animated Jesus himself, and it should animate his followers. Jesus does not talk here about prayer, or doing liturgy, or even going to church. The ministry of Jesus is action in the world. And this action, as indicated by the mission statement, upends the powerful and the privileged. It ultimately (and fairly quickly)

leads to Jesus' death. Faced with such a leader, will we be followers as well, undergoing our own paschal mystery? Or are we content to read about his ministry rather than do it, hear about it rather than practice it?

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.

To the point: Following his baptism in the Jordan and time of temptation in the desert, Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth to worship in the synagogue. After reading from the scroll of Isaiah the people look at Jesus intently as he tells them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." When we read the Bible we remember the history of this great book. We think about the context in which these words were first written and proclaimed. But then we go further for we believe the *living* word has something to tell us today. How can these words of comfort and justice for the poor and oppressed be fulfilled in our time? What role do we have in making these words come alive here and now?

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: The prophet Nehemiah lived in a time of great upheaval for the people of Israel. Following the Babylonian exile the Israelites were gradually allowed to return to their homeland. They returned to find Jerusalem in ruins. The walls that protected the city are no longer standing. Hearing of the distress of his fellow Israelites, Nehemiah also returns to Jerusalem to lead the restoration efforts. Under Nehemiah's leadership the people repair the walls to the city so they might once again dwell in safety and begin the task of restoring their homes and the temple. The first thing Nehemiah does once the walls are repaired is to gather all of the people together and to have Ezra, the scribe, read to them from the Torah. This is the moment we hear about in today's first reading. In Ezra we can see a precursor to Jesus' proclamation of Scripture in Nazareth. Ezra reads the words to the people to remind them of who they are. They are the people of God, God's beloved. Because of this they are called from their desolation and mourning into joy, for through "rejoicing in the LORD" they will regain their strength.

to experience: In today's first reading and gospel we see the people listening to the word of God. We are called to be formed by this word as well, to encounter it deeply and to invite it to change our lives.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today's passage from Psalm 19 is a hymn to the beauty and value of the law. When the psalmist sings in praise of the law, it is not just the Ten Commandments that are being lauded. The "law of the LORD" refers to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible and the most precious books to the Jewish people. These books form the Jewish people in their identity. In today's first reading Ezra reads to the people from "daybreak till midday . . . the book of the law." Though the people have been in a time of desperation and mourning as the work to restore Jerusalem, they are reminded to rejoice, for their most precious possession, one that can never be taken away or destroyed, is the law of the Lord.

to psalmist preparation: Consider what it would be like to sing these words in the midst of difficult times—in grief, sorrow, or uncertainty. What does it mean to place your trust and hope in the law of the Lord and to count it as your greatest treasure?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

As it says in the book of Nehemiah, Ezra reads from the book of the law of Moses to the people from daybreak to midday and "all the people listened attentively." What helps you to listen attentively to the word of God?

St. Paul tells us, "[Y]ou are Christ's body, and individually parts of it." How do you see this metaphor within your life? How does your family and/or community respect and encourage the gifts of all?

In the gospel, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah what could be considered his mission statement, one that all of us as followers of Christ could also consider *our* mission statement. What is one action you could do this week to help bring about the liberty, justice, freedom, and healing that Isaiah talks about?

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 27, 2019

Gospel (cont.)

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21; L69C

*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.*

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."