

When the Magi found that the star led to Jesus, the epiphany was that *Jesus is a king worthy of kingly gifts*. When Jesus was baptized, the *epiphany was that Jesus is the beloved Son of the Triune God, the Reaper who judges the world, and the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*. When Jesus turned water into wine, the epiphany was that *Jesus is a wonder-working prophet who came so that we could share in heaven's joy*.

The epiphany in today's text is that *Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has been anointed to proclaim the good news of God's favor, the beginning of the greatest-ever "year of Jubilee"*. And just like at Jesus' baptism, we see a *Trinitarian Epiphany*: In verse 18, where Jesus is reading from Isaiah 61, "**the Spirit** is upon me", the Spirit "**of the Lord**", (here referring to God the Father as the Lord), and the Spirit of the Lord is upon **the Anointed One**, the *christened* one, that is to say, the Christ, the Messiah. The Spirit, the Lord, and the Christ: we see the Trinity working together to reveal God in all His fullness to everyone who hears the good news.

This epiphany takes place in Nazareth in Galilee, as Jesus returns to His hometown. His ministry is just beginning, but already His fame is starting to spread. There is *buzz* around Jesus, and so He is given opportunities to speak in synagogues all throughout Galilee as He makes His way back to Nazareth, and everywhere He speaks, verse 15 says, He is *glorified* or *praised*, by all, a word that usually refers to the glory or praise given to God.

Now, a synagogue is a meeting place for worship where Jews would gather when they couldn't make it to worship at the temple. A synagogue meeting would include prayers and the reading of God's Word, but animal sacrifices were reserved for the temple. Usually, a series of men would be chosen to read selections from the law and the prophets, and then a message would be preached that explained and brought together the various readings of the day, which is what we heard taking place on a massive scale in the reading from Nehemiah, and what we still do when our preaching is guided by the lectionary, like it is today and has been for the last few weeks.

And so when Jesus returned to Nazareth, He attended the synagogue on the Sabbath, which was something that wasn't commanded by the Jewish law, but it was Jesus' custom. Think about that: *obedience* gladly does whatever is commanded, but what does *love* do? When Jesus couldn't worship at the temple, He sought out the next best thing. So how about you? Are you a "bare minimum" worshiper, or do you seek out opportunities to worship with God's people above and beyond what is commanded? What would it look like for you to follow Jesus' example? (It might look like Psalm Sing).

Back to the text: verse 16, Jesus stood up to read, and the scroll of Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll, and found chapter 61, and read the first two verses. Your version may have sounded different than what I read, and you might have even noticed that what Jesus read isn't

exactly the same as what you find in your Bibles in Isaiah 61. This is because of two things: first, different editions and translations, and second, the role of the reader. It seems that the reader had the freedom to do a little bit of explaining while reading, and not just during the sermon that followed. Here, especially, we should notice that Jesus inserts a phrase from Isaiah 58:6 to clarify the proper understanding of Isaiah 61. The phrase He adds is the one that says: “to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” More on that in a minute.

But what I to draw your attention to first is that *the power at work in Jesus* from verse 14 is *the same power at work in the Anointed One* in verse 18, in the quote from Isaiah. The big reveal of verse 21 is foreshadowed for you, the reader of Luke's gospel. You already know what the people in the synagogue were about to learn: Jesus is filled with the power of the Spirit. The Anointed One is filled with the Spirit. *Jesus is the Anointed One.*

This means that when we hear what the Anointed One is going to do by the Spirit's power, we are listening to a description of *Jesus'* ministry. Why has Jesus been given the Spirit? What is He going to do? The text answers that question by repeating: “Proclaim, proclaim, proclaim!” Jesus' mission is one of *proclamation*.

Jesus has gained a reputation not by power or by might, not by personality or charisma, but by the Spirit, and He has been given that Spirit to do a work of preaching, proclaiming, and announcing. Jesus did not come as a military leader or a politician. He is a *teacher*. His mission is accomplished *by speaking words*.

This, of course, should immediately connect Him in our minds with God. Who else does His work by speaking Words? *God*. What did God do with Words? *He made the world*. *Other gods* accomplish their work through *other means* – by power or by might, by the sword, by throwing lightning bolts, by seduction; but our God accomplishes His work through *words*.

This is why Christians are in love with words. This is why we love speaking words, hearing words, writing words, reading words. We don't teach our children literacy because it is useful; we educate them in words because our God is *a God of Words*.

And in fact, Jesus' *mission itself* comes from the Word. Jesus reads His job description right out of Scripture. Jesus doesn't decide what the mission is, or how He's going to accomplish it. He hears and obey God's Word, and then God's Word is put in His mouth for Him to proclaim.

And so now we need to ask, “What is the message that Jesus proclaims?” The answer is “God's favor.” And to a people who are scattered from their homeland, ruled over by their enemies, and misled by their religious leaders, this sure is good news. They are long past the point of saving themselves. They need God's favor, and God's favor is exactly what Jesus

announces! The message comes very much like the Jubilee announcement in Lev. 25, proclaiming a year of returning things back to rights, of correcting everything that had been going wrong.

And it is very interesting that Jesus puts down the scroll mid-sentence, right before Isaiah talks about God's judgment. Jesus wants His message to be known as *proclaiming God's favor*, not favor and judgment. If a modern preacher did this, he would get in trouble with a lot of people for being soft on judgment and wrath. Now, Jesus believes in judgment, and He will speak repeatedly about the dangers of hell throughout His ministry. But God's favor and God's judgment are not equally important to Jesus. It's not necessary to preach about judgment every time you preach! As Jesus begins His ministry, He wants His message to be known as a message of God's favor.

And in particular, the Lord's favor will be shown to the *poor*, the *captives*, the *blind*, and the *oppressed*. Those whose lives have been filled with *bad news* finally hear *good news*. Those who would look at their life and think "My life is so hard because God hates me!" hear "No! God loves you, and is coming to deliver you." Do not believe that just because you have problems in your life that God has no favor for you.

Maybe that's what you need to hear today. Maybe you have never really felt comfortable around God. Maybe you don't know how He feels about you. Maybe you have never been secure in His love. This describes a lot of Christians! You are serving God in fear, trying to prove yourself worthy of His love, but it seems like His favor is so far away.

Are you ready for an epiphany? Jesus came to tell you that God's love is right here! I am not reporting to you what Jesus said to people long ago, I am telling you what Jesus is saying to you today: God's favor is right here, right now, for you!

And I don't think we should worry too much about whether Isaiah and now Luke are talking about spiritual or physical realities. The Anointed One takes care of both – spiritual poverty and material poverty, physical blindness and heart blindness. Sin, fallenness, and brokenness affect both body and soul, and the Messiah comes to proclaim good news to broken bodies *and* broken hearts.

Here is where the line that Jesus quotes from Isaiah 58 becomes important. In that chapter, God is rebuking His people for faithfully conducting worship services, but not actually living like God's people. Their words *sounded* good, but they didn't live up to them. But the Messiah will have nothing to do with such hypocrisy. He doesn't come just to *proclaim* liberty, but to *set at liberty*. The Messiah's words are not dead words; they are powerful, *accomplishing* what they *announce*. It would be a lousy Messiah who came and announced God's provision for the poor or His liberation of the captives, but then nothing happened. Aren't you glad Jesus isn't just talk?

Many Christians struggle to balance Word ministry and deed ministry – some think that Christianity is all about talking, reading, thinking, and knowing, and that working for justice and righteousness in the world is a distraction from the Church's mission. Other Christians react to this, and think that it would be better if Christians were to shut up and just love people. Giving serving, loving, doing – that's real Christianity.

Listening to Jesus' embrace of His job description helps us to figure this out: proclamation comes first – in the beginning was the Word – but if *doing* doesn't follow *proclaiming*, then the proclaiming wasn't actually empowered by the Spirit.

The Spirit does not anoint the Christ just to *talk about* relieving the oppressed, but to actually relieve the oppressed. Later in Luke, when John the Baptist wants to make sure that Jesus really is the Christ, Jesus backs up His words with His actions: “Tell John that the blind are receiving their sight, and the poor are having good news preached to them.” Remember, these are godlike words; when God speaks, things happen. Jesus does not say, “Hey poor, be warmed and filled! Hey captives, be free!” No, what Jesus *proclaims*, He *does*. He brings to pass the good news that He announces, most especially by securing God's favor toward us through His atoning death and life-giving resurrection. He *speaks* of God's favor, and then He *shows* you God's favor by dying in your place, and then He *secures* God's favor for you by sharing His Spirit with you, as a down payment on the full favor of God.

But this jumps ahead of the story in Luke 4. When Jesus finishes reading this passage, He sits down to preach (which is typical for the Jews – stand to read, sit to preach), and everyone in the synagogue was on the edge of their seat, waiting to hear what Jesus would say about this passage, one of the greatest visions of what the Messiah would do when He came. The synagogue was a bit like our church – not everyone paid attention all the time. It wasn't a rigid concert hall, but more of a free flowing, taking wailing kids out into the back sort of place. But at this moment, every eye in the whole synagogue was fixed on Jesus.

It was like everyone's favorite speaker had chosen everyone's favorite text. Maybe you watched this happen around the TV – so many TV shows are ignorable, but when Walter Cronkite's voice came on, or when Tom Brokaw started talking, you or your parents would turn up the TV and pay attention. Here was somebody worth listening to.

And then, combine that with your favorite subject: some of you listen up when I say Narnia, some when I mention football, and some of you when I talk about chocolate chip cookies. Some of you still need to tell me your favorites, so I'll know how to make sure you are paying attention. Your favorite speaker, talking about your favorite subject. Jesus, talking about the coming Messiah.

Everyone wanted to hear what He had to say, but not one of them was ready for what He did say. Jesus said, “Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The wait is over. The Anointed One is here. The Spirit is upon *me*. *This* is the year of the Lord's favor. Wow! What a day that must have been. They went to church to hear about the coming Messiah, and the coming Messiah came to church, too! Unbelievable! The entire synagogue had an epiphany in that moment: Jesus is the Anointed One, who has been filled with the Spirit to proclaim God's favor.

The message Jesus proclaims is one of *healing* and *hope* and *salvation*. And so the proper response to the preaching of good news is *gladness*. Most people don't think a sermon is complete until they've been told what to do, but Jesus' doesn't come with *instructions* for the poor. He doesn't bring *commands* for the oppressed. He doesn't have *action points* for the blind. The central message is not “do stuff for God so that He will give you His favor.” The good news that the Anointed Messiah preaches is not about what you do; it is about what *God is doing* through Jesus. Don't *do stuff* for Jesus. *Stand in awe* of Jesus. *Worship* Jesus, the One who has come down from heaven to make everything right for all the broken, sinful, suffering people here on earth. He's come to *announce* God's favor, and to *show* you that favor by healing you, setting you free, forgiving you, delivering you. God makes things right for the world by filling Jesus with the Spirit and anointing Him to proclaim the good news.

Are you poor in Spirit? Has life crushed you and burdened you with guilt and shame and trouble? *Hear the good news!*

Are you held captive by your sins? Are you caught in the grip of anger or lust or bitterness or selfishness? *Hear the good news!*

Are you being oppressed and taken advantage of? Are you crying out for justice to be done? *Hear the good news!*

Are you blind to the favor of God? When somebody says “God loves you.” Does that truth make it to your heart, or does it get stuck somewhere between your ears? *Then hear the good news, and glorify God for anointing Jesus to be the Messiah.*

What happened on that Sabbath is what happens every Sunday in every gospel-preaching church all over the world. Every week, this good news is proclaimed again: Jesus is God's Messiah, and He has come to fix a broken world, wipe away tears, and make all things new. The church has never gotten over that shocking, exciting, glorious epiphany, and we never will! The favor of God has come to you, and His name is Jesus.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*