

A New Day Dawning

Third Sunday of Advent

December 15, 2002

Background Study

Scripture Passage – Isaiah 61:1-4 (NRSV)

¹The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

Jesus Makes a Stunning Announcement

Last week we learned that John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, the one who would usher in the arrival of God's Kingdom. This week, our text is taken from Isaiah, a prophet who lived hundreds of years before Jesus, whose words were used by Jesus in making a stunning proclamation of his own.

In Luke's gospel, after Jesus' baptism and confrontation with Satan in the wilderness, he returns to his hometown of Nazareth to begin his public ministry. Luke (beginning at 4:14) tells us how Jesus went to his synagogue and rose to read from the scroll of Isaiah. Jesus unrolled the scroll to today's passage from Isaiah. Jesus read portions of this passage and announced that these words had been fulfilled! Wow! In doing so, Jesus announced that he was the anointed one¹, the Messiah promised long before, the one who would inaugurate God's kingdom. Jesus went on to imply that even Gentiles would be welcome in God's kingdom. Little wonder that Jesus was chased out of town – after all, who did this hometown boy think he was. But . . . why did Jesus choose this passage? What does it mean for us?

The Book of Isaiah

After the death of King Solomon in 921BC, the kingdom of Israel split in two. There was a northern Kingdom, called Israel, and a southern kingdom, called Judah. Isaiah was a prophet in Judah and lived about 800 years before Jesus. This book is a collection of his teachings and writings that was compiled and edited over several centuries. Sometimes we misunderstand the role of prophets among God's people, thinking of them in much the same way as we think of Nostradamus! Instead, the prophets were men who brought God's word to God's people, calling the people back to God and God's way.

¹ Anointing was a means of investing someone or something with power. The kings of Israel were anointed. Sometimes prophets were anointed. Even buildings or pillars could be anointed. 1 Samuel 24:6 refers to kings as the "anointed ones," which came to be the Hebrew word *mashiah*, or "Messiah." *Mashiah* was translated into Greek as *christos*. To call Jesus "Christ" is to call him the Messiah, the anointed one of God. So, you can see the significance of Jesus' claim that this passage from Isaiah, with its reference to "anointed," had been fulfilled!

God's Kingdom Come

Many centuries before Jesus, when God had first formed his people, he had made a covenant with them – he would be their God and they would be his people (Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 30:22). God promised them the restoration and renewal of all creation in the kingdom of God. He promised them a savior, a Messiah, who would usher in God's kingdom. Indeed, still today, each week when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray that God's kingdom will come, on earth as it is in heaven. Today's passage from Isaiah is one of many Old Testament word-pictures that try to help us see what God's kingdom is like.

In God's kingdom, the brokenhearted are healed, captives are set free, those who mourn are comforted – all this is truly Good News to the oppressed. In God's kingdom, swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Micah 4:5). The blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the mute will speak (Isaiah 35:5-7). The prophets of the Old Testament spoke long and clearly about the coming of God's kingdom. In his teachings and actions, Jesus taught and showed people what God's kingdom is really like. He healed the sick, he made the blind see – all that is wrong with this world will be healed. Jesus hung around with the outcasts of Jewish society to demonstrate that everyone is welcome in the people of God. He showed people that God's kingdom is a present reality, though not yet in all its fullness.

A New Day

In Advent, we celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed of God. When Jesus rose in the synagogue to read from Isaiah, he wasn't simply making some interesting theological point, he was proclaiming that a new day had dawned. For the rest of his earthly life, Jesus showed the Jews a new

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is a diverse library of books written, edited, and compiled over many centuries. It is the Bible that Jesus read. As Christians, we hold that these 39 books are sacred and inspired, that they are God's word for God's people – every bit as much as the New Testament. Still, they can seem very foreign to us, coming from ages far removed from our own, a world of brutal warfare and animal sacrifice.

In the Bible Academy session that begins the week of January 13, we will offer two classes on the Old Testament. On Monday evenings, I will teach *Introducing the Old Testament*, aimed at helping us make sense of the Old Testament. On Thursday evenings, Steve Edwards will teach a class on David and the kings of Israel, *The House of David*. For more information on these classes and others, see the registration materials in the upcoming St. Andrew newsletter. You can also go to the church website at www.standrewumc.org.

way of being the people of God so that they might truly be the light to the world. We have the same responsibility to be God's light, to do all we can to build a world in which God's will is done, to bring about the marriage of heaven and earth that we pray for each week. But in seeking after this divine marriage, we are not on our own. Jesus is Emmanuel (Matthew 1:23), meaning "God-with-us." The Holy Spirit is our "comforter" and "advocate" (John 14:26 & 15:26). The new day is a day of comfort and peace and joy. It is a little ironic that the stress of the holiday season can make it so hard for us to embrace the peace of God's kingdom. We ought to catch our collective breath and see the reality of God's kingdom in the look of unbridled joy on children's faces, in our efforts and gifts that help and serve others, in the personal relationships that we cherish, and in all the goodness of this life.

Next Week

Next Sunday we'll begin taking a closer look at the Christmas story told by Luke. Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she will bear a son and she must name him Jesus. Her baby will be called the Son of the Most High and will be given King David's throne!

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Luke 4:14-30 Jesus goes to his hometown.</p>	<p>Day 2 Isaiah 58:6-11 Jesus also read from this passage in Nazareth.</p>
<p>Day 3 Micah 4:1-7 A word-picture of God's kingdom.</p>	<p>Day 4 Zephaniah 3:14-20 God's promise of a new day.</p>
<p>Day 5 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 God makes a covenant with David – a covenant fulfilled in Jesus.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

