

In the Name of the Father , and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This morning's gospel,

appropriately appointed for this season of Epiphany,

a time marked by the showing forth of Jesus as the Messiah,

is rich in its unambiguous and theologically complete

announcement of the in breaking of the promised kingdom

Jesus comes to the synagogue in Nazareth and reads from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,

because the LORD has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor;

he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives,

and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,

This revelation of Jesus the Messiah in theological terms is essential to a right understanding of our faith:

Early Church Father Origen writes:

I can see the eyes glazing over at the mention of the early church fathers...but scripture as interpreted by the Fathers is the foundational hallmark of Anglican theological reflection....and it there that we must always start:

So Early Church Father Origen writes:

this was the text chosen in the providence of God to declare that the messianic era of salvation now begins in Jesus.

that this Jesus is both God and man.

Cyrial of Alexander writes

**that in his anointing by the Holy Spirit
Jesus will reunite us with the Holy Spirit
through our communion in his flesh**

And St. Ambrose writes:

**that these very first words of Jesus' public ministry
refer specifically to the Trinitarian plan of salvation**

These same Early Church Fathers write:

This is good news to the poor....

(which you understand, don't you, is all of us

...tempted and trapped as we are in the constructs of this world)

This is good news to the poor

**Precisely because the Savoir is now present in the world,
in the midst of our existence,
to release the captives...that would be us**

**And the Messiah's salvation breaks through in this acceptable year
of our Lord**

In him the long expected year of favor is begun and present:

This referring to his ministry of miracles

in which he releases creation from bondage

And to his crucifixion

when that release becomes a cosmic reality

Origen writes that after the reading from Isaiah was over

the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Jesus,
the Word made flesh.

The Word made Flesh

The promise of God comes happens in Jesus

The expectation of the prophets is now a reality in Christ

This is what it means that the Word became Flesh

That the promise and the prediction recorded in the scripture

Becomes real and is fulfilled in the flesh, the person of Jesus

So the Psalmist proclaims:

...this is the one

...the Lord

...promised and now among us

Who is like the LORD our God...?

He takes up the weak out of the dust *

and lifts up the poor from the ashes.

And what does that look like???? Well...

good news to the poor

release to the captives

recovering of sight to the blind

liberty for those who are oppressed

Ironically that this is good news to the poor...means it applies to all of us

We may not know that we are poor.

Most of us would agree that the people in Haiti are poor

But reality is we simply live in degrees of poverty

And this can be true on the strictly worldly level

in that there is always someone somewhere

living more lavishly, having more fun than we are

There is always more perfect air, clearer water, a better sunset imagined by us,

making us feel always somewhat comparatively impoverished

Spiritually this is true as well as we understand ourselves to be somewhere on the continuum

between held captive to the things of this world on the one hand

and freed to live our lives dedicated to God alone on the other

And certainly this is

...evidenced by our individual generosity

...and reflected in the heart and instincts of our community

Not only is our congregation growing in numbers,

But in intensity of faith and wisdom of the ways of God

And this is of great importance:

after all it is with these concerns that Jesus launches his ministry:

Good news to the poor

Release to the captives

Sight to the blind

Liberty for the oppressed

And our growth spiritually is when we apply this:

Not only to moral imperatives in the world around us

But as God works his purposes within us

in our own hearts and minds and souls

Further, to make this all the clearer

**Let me suggest to you that the secular/worldly journey in which we
are by our existence involved**

is contrary to or opposite our religious journey

This is not to understand our secular lives to be evil

In fact I would think that in the same way we cannot understand

...hot without the experience of cold

...or joy without the experience of sadness

...we cannot catch a glimmer of heaven

without an sense of hell

...we cannot understand the Holy

without having seen something of the profane,

We are participants in both

**the worldly and heavenly,
the secular and the religious journeys,**

**and they play off each other in a way that is important
to our understanding of God's salvation:**

The secular journey involves movement from Dependence to Self-Sufficiency

...from entry into the world with nothing

**to the accumulation of all the things needed for an
earthly existence**

The Religious journey is one from Self-Sufficiency to dependence

... from having everything

to possessing nothing

We are born into this world weak and helpless

...and it is by the work of our parents

that we become strong and self-sufficient.

We are also born into this world with nothing

...and it seems, up to some point, life is about accumulating

Our own clothes

Our own washer and dryer,

that in itself reflecting the futility of this world

But in a wonderfully and spiritually helpful way

...we run into those moments in life where this cycle reverses.

When Zack and Melissa were home at Christmas

Jessie and I moved from Self-sufficiency to dependence

From my perspective it was like having a live in nurse by profession and a chef by hobby...

And for a hypochondriac who likes to eat like me this is pretty much a nice situation

Although it might account for the fact that I am more than few pounds beyond my target weight

In the midst of this journey from dependence to independence

There is the spiritual journey which is the opposite

The journey from dependence on our own wisdom and energy

To dependence on God alone

The journey from self definition and strength of character

To being defined as a child of God

and standing in the power and purposes of God alone

When we would otherwise be destroyed

but God gives us life

When we are hollowed out

and God fills the empty space

It is when we are stripped bare and exposed for all the world to see:

no longer possessing but desolate

no longer proud but humbled, even humiliated

that we at last know the need for this Saviour who brings

good news to the poor

release to the captives

recovering of sight to the blind

liberty for those who are oppressed

And in that moment we are released and liberated simply by repentance and amendment of life:

And this is far more than just admitting we offended someone and apologize

It has to do with the admission

that we are incapable in of ourselves of producing what we need

and that what we need comes from God alone

which is precisely why the poor hear this as good news

and the blind can see it for the miraculous gift it is

The word mortification might be helpful here:

To be mortified to us might simply mean to be embarrassed by what those around us think of us

But to be mortified more accurately has to do with the diminishment of our strength, vitality and functioning...

To be mortified is to be mortal...as in mortally wounded...to acknowledge our mortality

Repentance is not about begrudgingly admitting that we are wrong:

Repentance and amendment of life is about mortification

and from that moment of awareness, something akin to a near death experience

embracing the salvation promised for us in Jesus Christ

forsaking our possessions to be possessed of God

depending no longer on our own strength but on God alone

It is what St. Paul is describing when he writes in Romans:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies

so that in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us

and nothing will be able to separate us from this love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord

St. Luke concludes this account by saying: the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And this is our calling...to fix the eyes of our bodies and our souls on this Jesus

Who in bringing us

from sufficiency to dependence on him

from accumulation to desolation

**brings us death to life
and binds up our broken hearts**

Origen writes in his Homilies on Luke's gospel:

When you look to him, your faces will be shining from the light of his gaze.

You will be able to say: The light of your face, Lord, has made its mark upon us.