

The Lord Has Anointed Me

Advent 3

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Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah spoke from divine revelation that Jesus would be anointed. That is what Jesus' title, Christ, means. Christ, like the Old Testament term Messiah, means "the Anointed One."

Jesus was not the only one to be anointed for God's purposes. Many in the Old Testament were anointed with oil for the task of being a prophet, priest, or king. What is significant is that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit to fill all three of these positions: prophet, priest, and king.

Seven hundred years is a long time. It is several generations of us human beings. Most things will be forgotten in that length of time. Going from Genesis to Exodus, a few generations passed, and the new Pharaoh no longer remembered Joseph, who had interpreted his predecessor's dreams.

How many things from seven hundred years ago do you know and remember from your history classes? To put this in perspective, Luther was five hundred years ago; so what happened two years further back? Granted, some of you may know if you are history majors or history buffs, but most likely, most of you do not remember—if you were even taught.

What about seven hundred years from now? Will Marvel's Avengers or D.C.'s Justice League still be the talk of the day? Will Star Wars will be around? These films are impressive now, but just as things that were impressive seven hundred years ago are not remembered by us today, what will be remembered about us in the future?

Yet the prophecies in Isaiah were not only remembered but even fulfilled seven hundred years after his life. Jesus would be born to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. As we look forward to the coming of Jesus this Advent season, it is beneficial to look to the past, to the Old Testament, to see that God fulfilled His promises in Him. For that reason, we turn to our Old Testament text from Isaiah to see how seven hundred years later, Jesus would be the Anointed One of God.

Verse 1

Right at the start, we read that this section of Isaiah is in the first person; but the speaker is not Isaiah. It is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, speaking through Isaiah. He says through Isaiah, "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, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified."

Here Jesus speaks of His anointing with the Holy Spirit. Last week we heard how Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River; and how the Spirit descended on Him like a dove. Indeed, the Spirit alighted on Jesus to anoint Him for God's purposes. Here in Isaiah, Jesus makes it clear ahead of time what those purposes would be: to be God's prophet. To be the One bringing "good news to the poor...to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

Jesus would be coming as the Messiah at just the right time to release those bound in sin, those afflicted by their state of being sinners. That was part of the very message Jesus would be sharing in His ministry as God's prophet. He was anointed to be the one who would proclaim the year of the Lord's favor to those in that bondage. He would come to do this not for Himself, but for all sinners. He would come for you. He would come to release you from your bondage to sin.

Today, it is still His message that is preached from this pulpit and in every pulpit throughout the world which faithfully and properly preaches Jesus' message. It is not the message of the preacher, for he is only the messenger. It is Jesus' Word which continues to be proclaimed.

Verse 2

"They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations...For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed."

These middle verses are about the life of a redeemed Christian. Those who have heard the Good News of the Gospel will be the ones to "build up the ancient ruins" and "raise up the former devastations." Here Jesus is not speaking literally but metaphorically. The "ancient ruins" and "devastations" are other sinners. Like Christ, our mission has become to spread His Word. As we share the Gospel we build up those around us, restoring them to the former glory of humanity—that glory that we had in the Garden prior to the Fall.

But again, the message that we proclaim is not ours, it is not yours that you might boast. The message belongs to our Lord Jesus, the Messiah who was to come and who spoke these words to the prophet Isaiah ahead of time. The Word that brings sinners out of the bondage of their sin is never ours. It is never the words of the pastor speaking them that it is because a pastor spoke this way or that way. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that if a pastor is just charismatic enough he will win others. In fact, Paul claims quite the opposite. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote to them: "I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God...we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory."

Paul claimed to be "weak", fearful, and "trembling." Yet he did not attempt to be clever when proclaiming Jesus' Word. He declared that he and the apostles imparted the secret and hidden wisdom of God—the Gospel—which God had "decreed before the ages." Paul had been called on the road to Emmaus by Christ Jesus Himself, but it was not to proclaim his own words, but Jesus' Words to the Gentiles. Today, every faithful pastor does the same.

Verse 3

Jesus' words continue: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations."

Just as Jesus was anointed for His work of proclaiming the Gospel to those bound in their sin, you and I have been clothed for continuing this work. You and I have received the robe of His righteousness at our baptism. In the hearing of His Word, we have also received the Holy Spirit. Jesus would be anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism to proclaim liberty to the captives, and we have been given the Spirit to continue His work.

It is true that pastors are set apart for the work of the public ministry with the laying on of hands and the call from God through a congregation. Yet that does not mean that only pastors proclaim God's Word. All of us have received Jesus' robe of righteousness and the Spirit at our baptism. This is not to say that there is no need for pastors as though anyone could preach any time he or she wished. And it is not to say that only pastors may speak God's Word. We are the Church with a capital "C". We work together for the building up of the body of Christ. And we do that through spreading Jesus' Word, that Gospel Good News that He, the very one who spoke to Isaiah seven hundred years before His coming, came two thousand years ago to free us from our sins, and that He will be coming again.
In Jesus' Name. Amen.