

The season of Epiphany is drawing to a rapid close, and the season of Lent is drawing inexorably closer. While we are clear on the purpose of Lent, we are clear on the purpose of Easter, and of Christmas, but less sure on the purpose of Epiphany. That simply may be due to its location in the southern hemisphere's timetable. It is located around our major holiday season. In the northern hemisphere the major holiday season is in the middle of Trinity.

The feast of Epiphany on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January is about the revelation of Jesus as the King of Israel, as Messiah to the world. This is done through the Magi coming to the babe in Bethlehem and offering the gifts of Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh. Just as Easter Day and Christmas day give shape to the season that follows these days so it is with Epiphany. Just as the Season of Christmas is about reflection on the Incarnation, Easter about resurrection, so with Epiphany it is about what does it mean to have the purposes of Jesus revealed to the nations?

Last week we had the earlier part of this passage, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, etc. Today we have Jesus declaring that these words are fulfilled in the hearing of the people.

I have never understood why you would divide this address in two, for neither makes sense without the other, so today I am going to reflect on Jesus words today casting our minds back to what he said in the readings last week.

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. What is the scripture that is fulfilled, and why is it so significant?

Jesus starts off by going to the part of scripture from Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. John the Baptist is filled with the Spirit, but Jesus is overshadowed by the Spirit. Remember Epiphany comes after Christmas. At Christmas we are told that the Spirit of God will overshadow Mary, and Jesus is conceived by the Spirit of God. At his baptism a few weeks ago the spirit descended upon Jesus. All this from Christmas to now is telling us about the authority that Jesus has, which comes from the Spirit of God, and because God is undivided from his Spirit, then the authority Jesus has comes from God himself.

He has anointed me. The Greek word for anointed is Chriō. It is the root of the word for Christ, as Christ was not Jesus' last name, but his job description, anointed one. We get the word Chrism, also from this root, and at confirmation the candidates are Chrismated, as they are at baptism with the oil of chrism which is blessed by the bishop at the chrism mass on Maundy Thursday. This chrismation signifies to them that they too have an inheritance in the authority that Jesus has given to him from God.

But what has Jesus been anointed to do? The rest of the prophecy from Isaiah is important.

He has anointed me to proclaim to the poor he has sent me. Many translations have he has sent me to proclaim good news to the poor. However, this is wrong. Luke says something much more profound than simply a proclamation of good news. What is the good news? The word used by Luke for poor has much more important implication.

The word conveys a sense of ones who have brought low, who have been subjugated, who had a position, and now don't, who had possessions and now doesn't. This idea was also characterized in the exile. The people had the possession of the land, and then they didn't and so were considered poor. Now when you put that into the context of Jesus' life situation you have a different connotation. Here is the nation of Israel again under domination. While there is no exile at this stage, the people do not have the possession of the land as they once had, and so have been made poor again. So Jesus' words might not actually be just for those who are begging, but because the nation through sin has become under judgment through the occupation of Rome, when Jesus says he has sent me, he might actually be saying he has anointed me to proclaim to the nation made poor by dispossession, He, God has sent me. Now that certainly is good news, but it is not the gospel which we translate usually as good news.

So his first task is to announce to the people of God that their dispossession is now over. They are no longer poor because of their oppression, they are relieved from that and are brought back into the inheritance reserved for them by God.

He then declares that he is to preach release to the captives. The proclamation event in Luke is always tied up with salvation, and so captives can be seen in relation to sin. He, Jesus, through his death and resurrection will enable people to be released from the clutches of sin. All that binds them, and prevents them from being who they are really called to be. This is further enhanced by the word release. The word has a sense of liberation and also forgiveness. So Jesus' words could read, he has sent me to forgive those imprisoned by their sin.

Then he declares recovery of sight to the blind. What does this mean? The people of Israel =believed in God, they believed that they were his people and he was their God. However, much had happened to them, and through one thing or another their faith in that reality had been obscured by the reality they faced each day. This is not uncommon today. There are many people who believe in God, but for some reason or another they have reprioritized God in their lives so that he does not figure much. It is as if they have become blind to God in their lives. Jesus comes to give recovery of sight so that they might see in Jesus God in a new light.

His next purpose is to send forth. Here the verb to send forth has an implication of commission. So those who are being sent forth have a role to play in the purposes of God. Who is being sent forth? Those who have been shattered and crushed by cruel oppression. Where are they being sent? Into liberation. The time for their oppression, all that has crushed and broken them is finished, and they are commissioned by Jesus to go into liberation and freedom, and by implication of their commission to tell of that liberation and commission.

Now if we thought that all that was enough, then we would be wrong, for in this Jesus saves the best for last. The acceptable year of the Lord, is nothing less than the announcement of Jubilee.

Now we in this time and age think of Jubilee simply as a fifty year anniversary. However, for the Jew the Jubilee year had great significance. It was the time when all debts were cancelled. If you had sold yourself into slavery to pay off debts you were released. If you had sold land to pay off debts it was returned to you. If you had borrowed something it had to be returned to the owner, it was basically a case of wiping the slate clean and starting again.

Because it was not a Jubilee Year, the announcement has even more significance, because it also meant that the Lord was going to set everything to right, and they the people were now in the last days.

So the words of Jesus had great significance. He was saying to the people that he, Jesus, is the Lord's anointed one to bring about salvation and forgiveness and to give everyone the opportunity for a fresh new start with God, no matter what had transpired before.

This has great significance for us. Jesus sits down and says this scripture is fulfilled in your ears. So as they are hearing God's word proclaimed to them, it is being fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Salvation, Jubilee, forgiveness is all wrapped up in one person, Jesus.

This has significance for us because of the words Jesus spoke. The spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me.

When you and I are baptized and confirmed we too are anointed with the chrism of God. We too become little anointed ones, Christians. We too are commissioned by God to do all those things that Jesus is commissioned to do. In fact, at the great commission he says these things, and greater you will do in my name.

You and I are called to proclaim that He, God, has sent us. We are called by God to go out into the world. But we go out into the world only because we have been commissioned by God, not because we have had some delusions of grandeur and simply decided to go out and try to save the world.

Part of the challenge of Epiphany therefore is for us to make known to the world the Lord Jesus whom we serve and why he is important to the world.

Are there people we know who have been brought low through sin, who need to be encouraged that their long time of alienation is over? Are there people we know who are not reaching their fullest potential through issues in their life?

Are there people who need to know that in Jesus they have an opportunity to have the slate wiped clean?

This is not about our making it right for them. It is about us being able to communicate the faith and to share our own life journey to enable people to respond in a positive way to the Gospel.

Epiphany is about making Jesus known to the world, and we are a people who are called to be an Epiphany people. We have the challenge before us to make Jesus known to the world. This is simply because the Spirit of the Lord is upon us, for he has called us to proclaim to the ones brought low that he has sent us, to remind them that he, God, is still in charge of this thing we call life, to proclaim to the captives in their minds, or in their jobs, or in their existence, release, to those who once believed in God, and for what ever reason have had their faith diminished so they are no longer able to see Jesus as he really is, the ability to see him in a new light, to those who feel under pressure, release, and to declare to all that in Jesus there is a new opportunity to make a fresh start.

This is our purpose. It is something that we do not do off our own back, but under the authority of the one who placed his spirit on Jesus and through the great commission puts us under that same authority. He gives us his power, his purpose, and calls us to operate faithfully in it. When we do we find that we are agents of transformation and renewal, such that God can do a new and marvelous thing in the lives of those around us, and therefore in this our parish that he has called us to minister in.