

Epiphany 1 C
St. Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
January 10, 2016
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Messiah?

"As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah..."

This is the sentiment of our times. People are filled with expectation and are looking for someone/something special. For some it is a *sort of messiah*.

If Advent was a season of preparation and expectation, the Epiphany season is all about raising expectations out there in the world. This is the work of *Telling the Good News*.

People are prepared each day to hear bad news. Good news is long overdue. People long to hear Good News instead of bad news. People have become cynical, believing that they can only expect bad news. In everything from politics to religion.

People have become cynical about politics. Few believe much will change in Washington, no matter who is in charge. The tenor of political discourse has become vulgar and distasteful, almost irrational. No one on either side seems to want to pay attention to what most people are concerned about or addressing the real tough questions. We expect little, and we know longer expect there to be a messianic like leader in our lifetime who will deliver us from all our problems.

When it comes to religion, sadly there is too much bad news there also. Televangelists trying to rest retired folks from their Social Security checks to build theme parks or fund private jets or air conditioned dog houses in the name of Jesus. Really? Really? People are not stupid. When they hear of these things they become cynical. Religions have also been rocked by other scandals, some financial and some sexual and some involving misdirected violence and hate-mongering. Needless to say, when you play *holier than thou*, eventually you will be humbled. It is like the law of gravity, what goes up, must come back down to earth. This is never more true than with self-righteous egos. While some still search for a charismatic church leader who will deliver them from their poorlino through a gospel of material abundance, the return of the real Messiah seems far in the distance to many.

Perhaps the point would better be made, *what is a Messiah, and why would we even be looking for one?*

Simply put, a messiah is one who comes to save in the midst of times fraught with problems. A messiah would take charge and bring justice. It is not hard to see what the Jews were expecting at the turn of the millennium. They were expecting a military leader who would stand up to their Roman conquerors. They were looking for a leader to restore the glory of the former days when David was King of Israel.

That may have been the messiah they expected, but that is not the Messiah they got. And they ought to have known better, as a description of the messiah was written in many places in their prophetic texts. What they got was God walking among them as a human being on this earth.

Let's look at the Messiah that the prophets foretold, and see if this sounds like someone familiar to you. We will start with the famous Isaiah 53:2-10, the Messiah as suffering servant:

"He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. [deceit because he was buried with the rich man] Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin..."

And again the prophet writes in Isaiah 42: *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; [Does that not sound like the scene at the end of today's Gospel, where God speaks to the assembled crowd at the Jordan, witnessing the Baptism of Jesus?] I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. [How did he accomplish that?] He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;*

[doesn't that sound exactly like the still small voice of God?] *a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching... [the area around the Galilee] I have given you as a covenant to the people, [a new Covenant as we now know] a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them."*

Who do these words sound like to you? Is not the core of the Gospel revealed in these words, not a military messiah, but one who is gentle and quiet, one who seeks to lift up the downtrodden and oppressed? This is a Messiah who will heal the sick and give sight to the blind. This is a Messiah who will feed the hungry and visit those in prison. This is a Messiah who will inspire justice, mercy, dreams of peace and real love between human beings down through the ages since his visit to us. This is not the guy they were expecting, though it is the Messiah we know who did come and will come again.

John was a great preacher and a very holy man. He was known as the Holy One of Israel. (as we now know from a recent archeological dig by a local scholar—Dr. Richard Freund—from the University of Hartford who found what is likely his tomb at Qumran) John did not mince words, but spoke the truth boldly to a world that needed to hear it, and he did so fearlessly, speaking directly against the corrupt authorities at the cost of his life. It is easy to see how many mistook him for Messiah. Yet he himself

said of the one who was coming, that he was not worthy to untie the thong on his sandals.

We have a Messiah in the person of Jesus the Christ. What we should remember are the words of the prophet today, speaking not only to the first century citizens of Palestine, but also to us in Isaiah 43: "*Do not fear, for I am with you*" And he still is and will be with us until the close of the age. Make room for God in your hearts. AMEN