

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee. Jesus returns to Galilee from the wilderness, where he was driven by the same spirit after his baptism in the Jordan River. “Filled with the power of the Spirit.” Luke the evangelist gives us a clue with this phrase, a hint that something very important is about to happen. From the beginning of Luke’s Gospel account the Spirit plays a crucial role, moving prophets to seek Jesus, moving John to proclaim a baptism of repentance, and leading Jesus himself first to the riverbank, then to the desert, and now to the land of his childhood. This phrase is a signal from our patron to pay attention, because we are about to witness prophetic power. When Luke tells us that someone is filled with the Spirit, we are to take what follows as divine inspiration from God’s own voice.

Jesus enters many synagogues throughout the land of Galilee, reading scripture aloud and teaching to the gathered communities. As a student of Hebrew and of the Holy Scriptures, Jesus has some traditional authority to speak on these things and to preach and teach, but his audience understands that there is something special about him, and word gets out. This is no ordinary man, although the venue and style of his teaching is entirely traditional and socially acceptable. Jesus attracts praise because the power he holds within himself is magnetic, and his inspired teachings spark a fire that awakens hope in those whose hearts have long felt cold.

Jesus returns home to the town of Nazareth where he grew up, where his family still lives and works and worships, trailed by eager students of his teaching and preceded by rumors of his miracles. Jesus goes up into the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his custom and as was the habit of most faithful Jews of the time. This action was entirely ordinary, no more spectacular than a faithful Christian entering the sanctuary of their parish church on a Sunday morning. His choice to stand up to read from the scroll of sacred text was common, an honor and an expectation of literate Jewish men like himself. The scroll of Isaiah was given to him. It is likely that Jesus spent many hours of his young life listening to others read or recite from this text, and he himself might have learned to read from this very scroll. In returning to it now, Jesus is behaving no differently than a long time member returning as a lector on a Sunday morning after being away for school or on holiday. In reading aloud, Jesus makes no edits or interpretations to the text, only reads the familiar words of prophetic introduction. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. And as he rolls the scroll, he says simply that these words are true, and are not merely a prediction of things to come but a tangible and present reality. In the center of religious life in his community, in the place where his family worshipped and fellowshipped and where he learned the history of his people, Jesus stands up and introduces himself.

The scripture that Jesus reads is a prophet's message to a people in pain, an announcement of a year of Jubilee, a time when wrongs are made right and debts are forgiven and the fallen are reconciled to the community and captives are restored to their families. The prophet Isaiah proclaims that what follows will be good news to the poor first of all, that captives will be released and sight will be restored to the blind and the oppressed will receive freedom. The prophet proclaims sacred time, a time defined by liberation of all forms. Jesus tells his audience that this scripture is fulfilled in their hearing. The evangelist does not indicate that any great wave of miracles follows his words, clear eyed blind men do not overrun the synagogue and the shackles do not fall from the wrists of those in the nearby jail. These ancient words are not a magic spell that overturns injustice in an instant. Jesus is introducing himself to his people, to his community, as someone that is both exactly who they've known and loved and someone entirely different from what they always expected. It is God, not the prophets who speak in God's name, who brings about the liberation of the world from sin and injustice. Jesus, in quoting the prophet and claiming the prophesy fulfilled, announces to the world that he is not a prophet. He is the fulfillment of the prophets. Jesus is the freedom and liberation that only God can bring.

Jesus tells the world who he is with old and familiar words, in an old and familiar place, on an ordinary day surrounded by people of no particular importance. The

Spirit of the Lord brings the Son of God to proclaim the Glory of the Gospel among the ordinary routines and habits of a life of faith. Not in a grand palace or the Temple, and not to kings or to great crowds. Jesus is not a wild man living a life of solitude in the desert like John and many prophets who came before. Jesus is not a mighty warrior born to raise up an army or a prince born to ascend to an earthly throne. The first people to experience his divine teachings are those who had known him since childhood, those who were used to hearing the scriptures read and interpreted by his familiar voice as he grew in stature and in faith. Jesus introduces himself, one day at a time, to the good faithful folks in the neighborhood parish, to the people who keep the faith, to the ones who are looking for God's liberation in their own lives. Today this scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing.