

Christmas 2

I take as my text today, from the prophet Isaiah:

...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

We are in day 12 of the 12 days of Christmas. We have celebrated with joy, while also setting aside time for solemn commemoration.

We celebrate the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer; we remember the first martyr of Christ, St. Stephen; we commemorate the brutal killing of the innocent children by King Herod on the Day of Holy Innocents; we celebrate the Circumcision of our Lord; and then the Season comes to a close, just as we begin to celebrate on the morrow the Feast of the Epiphany, the Manifestation of our Lord to the world.

Caught somewhere in the middle of all this is the Second Sunday after Christmas. It's almost like Low Sunday after Easter Day.

If we take note of the rich sources of our liturgical traditions, we find that the Collect for this Sunday comes from the Gregorian Sacramentary, and the Gospel from the Sarum Missal, while the Epistle Lesson itself is peculiar to the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.

The three verses from Isaiah are as if they were written specifically for Jesus. They reflect beautifully the saving, missionary work of the Messiah. Indeed, our Lord applied these same words to Himself at the beginning of His ministry. We find Jesus quoting those same words in St. Luke's account of our Lord's entering the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath, and reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, though the words in St. Luke's Gospel differ slightly:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Jesus followed His reading by saying, *This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

With His ministry defined, Jesus set out on His journey to the Cross.

How did those words from Isaiah define the ministry of Jesus?

First of all, we see that Christ was sent by God the Father, and that He was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah. The Holy Spirit lit upon Him in the form of a dove when our Lord was baptized by John the Baptist and remained with Him. Being sent into the world by the Father, Christ's anointment was from everlasting.

We see in the words from the Prophet Isaiah a two-fold commission for the Messiah. At His first-coming, He would bring the Gospel, the good news, the salvation and redemption of the world. At His second-coming, He would bring judgment and comfort.

Now, in the fullness of time, Jesus Christ entered into His commission to preach the good tidings, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty and the opening of the prison, to proclaim the acceptable year and the day of vengeance, and to comfort and to appoint unto those that mourn.

Christ came to preach the joyful message, the glad tidings of salvation and redemption to the meek. Not the meek as we understand the word, but the meek as those who are oppressed and borne down by the evils of poverty and calamity.

The broken-hearted are those deeply distressed and afflicted, to whom the Messiah would bring comfort, a message of joy and consolation and peace.

For those held captive to sin, Satan, and the Law, the Gospel would set them free. They would be released, as if they were prisoners, from the confines of sin, and set free from the encumbrance of the Law to which they had become slaves.

Christ would proclaim the acceptable year, the time of salvation, the time of a New Covenant, and Christ would also proclaim the day when vengeance would be taken upon sin, when the works of the devil would be destroyed.

And Christ would comfort all those who mourn, all that are under affliction, under a sense of sin, who are oppressed by their transgressions and by the sins of others. He would open to them His pardoning grace and mercy.

Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, brings to the world the power to free the soul from the dungeon created by Satan and sin. Through Him we are emancipated and released from a law that oppresses and condemns the spirit.

Though the world was created as good, its goodness had been usurped by Satan and sin. By proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord, Christ began the process of redemption by destroying the hold that the usurpers had on God's creation.

The message He proclaimed is clear: faith and trust in God trumps Satan.

Satan does not love us. God does. Satan would not die for us. Christ did. Satan could not rise from the dead. Jesus has.

So, the choice that has been made available to us is between love and despair, between eternal life and death.

When we choose Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we will trade in our sackcloth and ashes to be clothed in the beautiful garment of salvation.

Thus clothed, the oil of joy will be poured upon us, Christ's gift, a gift that cannot be bought but conveys unspeakable joy, the joy of faith and eternal life.

When we put on the garment of praise, the robe of Christ's Righteousness, the heaviness that comes from the weight of sin, guilt, and fear of retribution will be lifted as our hearts swell with joy and God's Love.

The garments of salvation and praise are eternal, pure, perfect, and acceptable to God.

The images brought to mind by the words of the prophet Isaiah in foretelling the "acceptable year of the Lord," and the message that the Messiah brings to the world are vivid and powerful.

The event that we have just celebrated, the Nativity of Jesus, further illustrates the power and love of God.

As we progress through the Christian Year, the truth of God's Redemptive Love becomes more and more evident, and the choice we are free to make becomes more and more clear.

Either we accept and act upon God's Grace freely given to us or, by abrogation, we join Satan in eternal darkness.

We are in the *acceptable year of our Lord*; it began when Jesus Christ came into the world, that momentous event we celebrate at Christmas, and it continues until His Second Coming, when He returns as our Judge and Deliverer.

While ominous in tone, yet that Second Coming should be what we long for. It is the time when our souls and heavenly bodies will be united eternally as we are brought into the presence of God to be embraced in his eternal, divine love.