

Three weeks ago, politicians across the country were sworn into their new offices – governors, representatives, senators, on both the state and national levels. Television, radio and the internet make information like this readily available to all who are interested, as well as to many who aren't. Like so many swearing-in days of the past, I'm sure there were many people who chose not to watch, for whatever reason. But most people knew what was going on and had the opportunity to be informed and witness it if they wanted to be.

How different from one hundred years ago. How different from 1000 years ago. How different from the time of our text today, about 2000 years ago. You see, when a new King was chosen, when a new priest and sometimes even a new prophet was chosen in Israel, they too had a sort of swearing-in day: they were anointed. Anointing was a ceremony used in the Old Testament times to designate or single out a person for a special office or work, such as that of a priest or king. Olive oil was poured on the head, and the individual was told the special office or work for which he was being singled out.

Jesus was never anointed with olive oil as priests and kings often were, but he was especially designated for his Messianic work when John the Baptist baptized him in the Jordan River, as we read in Matthew 3:13-17: ***Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John...As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."***

Jesus was "anointed" with water and the Holy Spirit as the Father's way of identifying his Son and dramatically approving what his Son was planning to do: make atonement for sin. The Bible records for us the audible and visible approval by the heavenly Father, identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, the promised Messiah.

Even though there were no television cameras, radio transmitters, cell phones, or Wi-Fi the news travelled quickly. For ***Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.***

Every place he went, Jesus began his visit at the synagogue, the local church. He would teach there because it was the center of worship in every Jewish community. Here the Jews would meet on the Sabbath day to worship their God. Here also the young were taught the Word of God, the Ten Commandments, the history of God's people Israel and the prophecies of the coming Messiah. Here families and friends would gather together to celebrate with the Word of God and prayer all that the Lord had done for them in anticipation of all that he had promised yet to come.

On this particular visit to the synagogue Jesus was honored, as a visiting rabbi usually was, by being asked to read the Scripture lesson and to explain it. We would say, by reading a text and preaching a sermon on it. In fact, the service in the Jewish synagogue was very similar to that which we still use today. Psalms were sung, and prayers were spoken. A selection from one of the five books of Moses and another from a book of the prophets were read. This was then summarized and applied in a discourse similar to a sermon.

As Jesus ***stood up to read, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

When Jesus had gone up onto the raised platform at the front of the synagogue, the attendant would have opened the ark or cabinet in which the sacred Scriptures were kept and handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah to Jesus. This was a roll of parchment wrapped around a

wooden stick with another such wooden stick at the other end of the roll. Jesus unrolled the parchment from one of these sticks to the other until he came to chapter 61 of Isaiah (very late in the book...). Here he read the first verse and half of the second verse of the chapter. This was to be his text. And what a text! Again, *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

This prophecy of Isaiah described the work of the coming Savior and goes on to describe that work in great detail. The "poor" spoken of here are not those who are without money and the goods and comforts of this life, but those who are poor in spirit, that is, those who are poor in God's sight. They have no righteousness with which they can stand before God in the judgment. They are sinners, like you and me and everyone else at that synagogue in Nazareth, who deserve the punishment of God for their sins and who cannot rid themselves of the guilt of their sins. This makes them spiritually poor.

The condition of such sinners, our condition, is pictured by the prophet in different ways. And all of them are pictures designed to explain the condition we're in and our need for the gospel of forgiveness. First we're describe as captives. Sin is like a harsh taskmaster who treats the sinner as a slave, beats him and forces him to do many things he should not do or rather would not do. In this sense the sinner is a captive or slave of sin who needs to be set free.

The sinner is also described as "blind." Sin blinds our mind's eye so that we cannot see the truth. Often we do not think that our sin is sin at all. We have no way of judging our own actions properly, nor can we see them in the same light in which God sees them. We are spiritually blind and need to have our sight restored.

The last picture Isaiah uses is that of a man sitting in a prison, where he has been beaten by the jailor and is bleeding from his wounds. This is what sin does to you and me. It destroys our body little by little and causes us

crippling pain and profound suffering. Those who sit in the prison house of sin desperately need someone to set them free.

After reading this well-loved prophecy referring to the promised Messiah and the salvation he would bring, *[Jesus] rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down.*

As you can imagine *The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him...* waiting to hear what Jesus would say. People throughout the countryside recognized him as someone special. Many already confessed him to be the promised Messiah. But without the news crews and internet blogs, no one in his home town had heard him publicly admit it yet. What would he say? Almost like an inaugural address of a newly sworn in politician, Jesus spoke this sermon: "***Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.***"

On the campaign trail, politicians make all kinds of promises. Some, of course, is pandering to their base while other promises are coming from a genuine desire to make things better for our country as the politician and the political party see it. And as each term is completed, most politicians' records typically come to this: About 1/3 of the promises are broken, about 1/3 of the promises are partially kept, and another 1/3 are fully kept. And that kind of performance was often good enough to earn reelection to do it all over again.

But now consider Jesus and his inaugural address, so to speak. Jesus not only declares that those wonderful words of Isaiah were about him, but that they were already being fulfilled, just as Isaiah said. He is the one who preaches the good news to *you*. He is the one who binds *your* broken heart and restores *your* sight. He is the one who grants *your* freedom from sin and *your* release from guilt and shame. He is the one who says through "his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Yes, that day, this day, and every day, ***this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*** Spread the news and praise him, for his promise made, his promise kept, his promise fulfilled for *you*. Amen.