

“Nazareth – Part 1”

I want to set the stage for you as to how today's Holy Gospel took place. In the days before today's Holy Gospel – Jesus has been to the Jordan River, been baptized and covered by the Holy Spirit, and announced by His loving Father who said *“this is my beloved son in whom I am pleased.”* After the baptism, Jesus headed into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, and while there – Satan tempted Him, even to the point of offering Jesus the whole world. It is important to remember that the devil is seen as the “prince of this world” – and even used Scripture to tempt Jesus. Jesus stood firm and refused to cave – He would not sin and never did sin! When that time was ended Jesus headed back to the Galilee, where He invited His disciples to join Him, and then He headed home, eventually, to Nazareth. But in between that time it is important to see in today's Gospel that Jesus taught in synagogues, He taught, He cared for the sick, and He healed people. Before today's Holy Gospel from Luke, Jesus, along with His mother Mary, and His disciples attended the Wedding Feast at Cana, where Jesus performed His first recorded miracle. I believe that right after that miracle He then headed to Capernaum, where He began to teach, healing people along the way. You may remember that in the synagogue there He met the demoniac, the man possessed by a demon, and He struck the demon from him. Before doing so the demon recognized Him as the Son of God, and Jesus told him not to tell anyone, then He drove the demon out. It was there also that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, she got up and served the entire crowd that was there. So much took place, but we tend to look at the Gospels as “ok, last week was this, and this was this and it had to be synchronized that way.” I want you to understand the length of time that took place. It is thought that it could have been as much as a year to a year and a half before Jesus returned to Nazareth for what we read today, when He attended the synagogue on that Sabbath day. It was only after a time of ministering to the people, thought by many to be almost a year later, that He returned to Nazareth and attended the synagogue. Today's Gospel reading informs us that His reputation preceded Him – *“news about him spread through the whole countryside.”* (Luke 4:14)

I want to suggest to you that in the thirty years prior to Jesus' baptism that He was most likely spent years of silent preparation, study and prayer – in constant Communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. After the trials in the wilderness, it was time for Him to come ministering to the people that He was sent to save, the people of Israel. In this Gospel reading it was time to stand before His own home town. He knew everybody there and they knew Him. Isn't it like that in Douglas? How many times can you go into a place and people recognize you, or you are standing with someone who has been here all their life. I have only been here a year and a half, but it is amazing about who knows who, and who is related to who! There is a lot of Lotts, there's a lot of Tanners, there's a lot of Evans, there's a lot of Vickers, my goodness – there's a lot of people! Think about it in a town that is no bigger than the size of a football field – that's a real close home town!

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When Jesus opened the scroll, which as we read was His custom, what happened next was not what the people were expecting. Let me take a time out for a second: this is a two part sermon. Why? Because today's Holy Gospel left off at a "cliff hanger" (no pun intended.) Next week we will see how the people reacted and what they reacted to! I am going to give you some coming attractions to that but, there is too much to talk about in one sermon, and because the Gospel continues next week – and so will we.

The first words that Jesus spoke when He opened the scroll were declaring who He was – declaring that He had the POWER of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word δυνάμει "dunamei" means power. Do you recognize the root –dynamo, dynamic, dynamite? Do you remember what John the Baptist said in our Holy Gospel two weeks ago when he baptized Jesus and how he recognized Him as the Messiah? He said "*I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'*" (John 1:33) By Jesus taking and opening the scroll of Isaiah that was handed to Him, and opening to Isaiah 61; I am going to ask you to open your Pew Bibles to page 1159 – He began with these very telling words: "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus left off there, ironically enough, He stopped in the middle of the verse without reading the next line in about God in Isaiah 61:2 which says "*and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn.*" He was also referring to Isaiah 58:6 "*to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke.*" Then Jesus sat down to teach – in the first century every good Rabbi sat down to teach. When Jesus added, "*today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,*" the implication was so very clear. Yes, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah who could bring the kingdom of God which had been promised for so long—but this was not Jesus' time to declare judgement, that is why He omitted "*the day of vengeance of our God*" (Isaiah 61:2). Even still the crowd was fascinated at His teaching and the eyes of everyone were fastened upon Him. Jesus' words plainly stated that the offer of the favorable year of the Lord, the fact that the kingdom of God was being made available to them through Him. He was referring to the Jubilee – every seven years was a Jubilee. Every seven years debts were forgiven, people returned to their family homelands, amazing things happened. He was saying that God was doing something special, and that He was coming to heal people, to bring the good news of God's message for His people.

The people were amazed or marveled – the Greek word ἐθαύμαζον (*ethaumazon*) shows how they "marveled" "*at the gracious words that came from His lips.*" (Luke 4:22) Sometimes people have understood this simply to mean, they were amazed at what a good speaker He was. But immediately after the verses of today's Gospel they began to question the authority with which He could say these things. Now I used to think that the crowd got unruly because of what Jesus said when He said "*today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,*" but something else happened. I am going to give you some coming attractions to the rest of the Gospel story that

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we will read next week. After the verses they questioned the authority - how could Joseph's Son, the Boy they saw grow up in their town be the Messiah? They just could not connect the dots! In next week's Gospel reading we will see the continuation of this event and the outcome of Jesus' visit to the synagogue to the point of the people of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, wanting to kill Him.

So what was wrong with what Jesus said? What made these people who He knew all His life, kick Him out of the synagogue, try to hurry Him out of the town, and take Him off to the cliff edge to throw him over? It is not that they disliked the delivery of the Word, they thought it was eloquent. The decisive part is Jesus' comments to these people. What was wrong with what He was saying? He would go to make points about the great prophets Elijah and Elisha, and in doing so identifies himself with the prophets. Elijah was sent to help a widow – but not a Jewish one. Elisha healed a leper – and the leper was the commander of the enemy army. That's what did it. It wasn't Jesus' saying that *"today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* that drove them with anger and hostility. It was because Jesus was saying that God was rescuing BOTH Jew and Gentile. These people were waiting for God to liberate them from their pagan enemies, not for their enemies to be saved.

If you have been with me on Wednesday nights, the last two weeks we have been looking at "The Nativity Story." A while back I asked "what were some things that you wanted to learn about?" Some said they wanted to learn about the Temple, others asked about the area at the time of Jesus, and the last was about the Nativity story. We took two weeks to examine and look at the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. The Romans were killers! They taxed you until you had no more! They abused people, taking their children to pay unpaid taxes; they took their animals; they took their land! These people (the Jews) had had it up to here with their oppressors! All they asked for was for freedom, and here was this kid from their hometown coming in and telling them something different.

Jesus chose the passage, Isaiah 61 in which He quotes about the Messiah. Throughout Isaiah there are pictures of this mysterious 'anointed' person who will perform God's will. He speaks of Israel being called to be the light of the nations. Anytime you read in the Bible about "nations" it is not talking about Israel but instead the nations meaning Gentiles. The suffering servant spoken of by Isaiah in chapter 53 is amazing. Let's look at this on page 1147 of the Pew Bible - (Isaiah 53:4-5) *"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted." "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."* Jesus came not only to save the lost people from suffering of an eternal fire and to save people who God loved – and God loves everyone! It gives an opportunity for people to receive that; by His stripes, by His wounds – we are healed. He took our iniquities, our sin, upon Himself. We talked about during Jesus' baptism last week about a priest, as in Zechariah, in the Temple. The priest would out his hands on two goats; one would be sacrificed and the other would be sent out with the sins of Israel into the wilderness –

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called “a scapegoat.” The son of the priest Zechariah, laid his hands upon Jesus in the Jordan River, and thereby connected Him with our sins. He took them to the cross! He did not come to inflict punishment on the nations, but to bring God’s love and mercy to them. Do you know what mercy is? Mercy is NOT receiving what you deserve. Do you see the connection? Jesus’ claim to be reaching out with healing to ALL people was not what most first-century Jews wanted or expected. Jesus warned that unless they could see that this was the time for their God to be gracious, unless they abandoned their futile dreams of a military victory over their national enemies. They would suffer defeat themselves at every level – military, political and theological. From 66 to 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed, the Temple was destroyed, and even the people at Masada were destroyed. Jesus’ challenge and warning to them brings about a violent reaction. Next week we will further examine what happened that Sabbath day in the synagogue in Nazareth. We will see and hear about a surprising measure of God’s mercy and grace for all people. We will see the reaction of Jesus’ hometown to their beloved Son. Next week we will uncover the rest of the story.