

December 26th, 2021

“Christ Comes in the Power of the Spirit”

Isaiah 61:1-3

Introduction:

In the past month, Pastor Mike has led you through the Advent Season putting emphasis on the five advent candles. There is, of course, the Christ candle, that sits at the center of the other four Advent candles. That is as it should be, for while the world loses sight of Christ in its own rendition of the celebration of Christmas, for us as believers, Christ should be at the center of everything that we do regarding Christmas. As Mike pointed out, there are various symbolic meanings that are associated with the other four candles. Mike chose the symbols of Prophecy, Presentation, Propitiation and Promise and brought messages focused on each of those themes. In your Christmas Eve service, you read the story of the birth of Christ and, again using candles, had a visual reminder of the concepts of light and darkness. Darkness is, of course, the condition of the world, and individuals in it, apart from Christ. The light is Jesus Himself. In John 8:12, Jesus said, **I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.** The light is also the Gospel, the good news about who Christ is and what he has done to bring mankind forgiveness of their sin. The apostle Paul seems to combine both of these concepts of light in 2 Corinthians 4:4 where he explains how **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory (the light) of Christ, who is the image of God.**

The prophet Isaiah foresaw that light and proclaimed its coming some 700 years before the birth of Jesus. His active ministry is dated during the reign of four Judean kings from 740-695 BC. We have the astonishing account of his call to prophetic ministry in Isaiah 6:1-6 where he is awestruck by a vision of God in the temple and volunteers to be a messenger for God to God’s people. His message was often harsh and ill received by the people of Judah. Isaiah told them of God’s coming judgement because they had turned from following God and become an immoral and idolatrous people. God was, in the words of the seraphim of Isaiah 6, **holy, holy, holy** and because of His holiness and their sinfulness, they had to be judged. His prophetic messages of judgment would prove true approximately 100 years later in 586 BC when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the people of Judah into exile to the land of Babylon. But Isaiah did not bring only messages of judgment, he also brought messages of hope. He told them of God’s love and grace. He told them that God would eventually return them to Jerusalem and restore their relationship with Him. Isaiah also told them about a coming Messiah who would make everything right not only with the people of Judah but with people from all the nations of the world. This morning, I want us to look at one of those passages where Isaiah describes the ministry of the Messiah, Isaiah 61:1-3. I think it a fitting conclusion to our celebration of the coming of Jesus, our Messiah, our

Christ. Turn with me to Isaiah 61:1-3 and follow along as I read from the English Standard Version:

**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
²to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,**

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**the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.**

Let's look more closely at the message of this passage from Isaiah beginning with the first two lines of verse 61:1.

Isaiah 61:1a

**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me**

Who is the **me** of verse 1? The Sunday School answer is “Jesus.” Well, yes and no. From the context of these verses, chapter 60 and 61, Isaiah speaks of a **me** who would minister to the returning exiles. That would not be Jesus who would not be born until some 500 years after that return. But it would be the spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, who would minister to the people through men like Ezra and Nehemiah who provided needed leadership at key times after the return. Or through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who urged them to rebuild the temple. But ultimately, Isaiah was speaking about Jesus. The ministry described in these verses is a ministry that only God could do, though he would often accomplish it through the agency of men. So ultimately, this passage does describe the temporal and eternal ministry of Jesus. How can we be sure of that? Well, look again at the **me** of verse 1.

- The second line of verse one says that the speaker is anointed. In the OT, prophets, priests and kings were typically anointed with oil at the beginning of their service. The oil used for the anointing was costly, valuable, like that used by Mary, the sister of Lazarus, to anoint Jesus in John 12:1-8. The use of such expensive anointing oil implied that rich gifts of various kinds, both material and spiritual, were being bestowed upon the one being anointed to empower them in their service. But in addition to anointing with oil, prophets, priests and kings were often “anointed” by experiences of being filled with the Holy Spirit. That is clearly the type of anointing that is stated here. Hebrew poetry typically follows a pattern of parallel thought expressed in different ways in the same passage. The Lord's anointing mentioned in the second line restates and reinforces the declaration in the first line that **the Spirit of the Lord** was upon the speaker.
- **Anointed** is the meaning of the Hebrew title, Messiah, and the Greek title, Christ. Because of the divine and trinitarian nature of the Messiah, the Spirit and the Christ were and always will be one. Yet in the mystery of the trinity, they are also separate. The Spirit anointing of the incarnate Son of God, Jesus, was revealed to men by the descent of the Holy Spirit like a dove on him at his baptism. If we identify the **me** as the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God, notice the trinitarian nature of persons mentioned in the first line of verse 1: the **Lord God, the Holy Spirit, and me, the Son of God**.
- A confirmation that the **me** is the Messiah is that Jesus associated this passage with Himself when he read these verses in the synagogue of Nazareth, his hometown, and declared, “**Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.**” (Luke 4:21). We can, with confidence, believe that these verses describe the ministry of Jesus, both during his earthly ministry and down through the ages.

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Have established the identity of the speaker, let's look at what these verses say about him. The ministry of the Messiah is expressed in a series of statements introduced by the preposition “to”. Each prepositional statement describes a different aspect of His coming ministry.

Isaiah 61:1-2

**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;**

The Messiah would be a preacher. His purpose: **to bring good news to the poor**

- **good news** – Who doesn't like good news?
 - Contextually, it was the good news of the end of the exile.
 - Prophetically, it was the gospel news, The Gospel, of forgiveness of sin through the grace of God, a forgiveness that comes only through putting our faith in Jesus.
- **The poor** – This points to those in economic and/or spiritual poverty. Those who put their hope in fame and fortune in this life and who believe themselves confident to manage their lives on their own have no need of God, unless it is on their own terms.
- As Jesus said, **blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**, Matthew 5:3. Jesus brings the good news that in Him the kingdom of heaven has come to the poor in spirit.

The Messiah would be a healer: **to bind up the brokenhearted**

Who are the brokenhearted?

- Contextually, the exiles who were weighed down by their experience of bondage.
- Prophetically, all mankind, for apart from Christ, we are all weighed down by the weight of our sin and the burdens of life. There are thousands of ways people are living with broken hearts in our world today.
- The ministry of Christ was and is to bind up, to heal, those with broken hearts. As we see in the NT Gospel accounts, Jesus repeatedly healed those who came to Him of the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional needs that they had in their lives. If we were to give those of us here today the opportunity to bear witness to all the healing that Jesus has done in our lives, we would probably still be recounting those this time next Sunday. Jesus, the Messiah, is a healer.

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The Messiah would be a deliverer: **to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound**

- Contextually, Isaiah used terminology that appears in Leviticus 25:10 to describe the year of Jubilee. The prophets Jeremiah, in 34:8-10, and Ezekiel, in 46:17, would echo a similar message. The year of Jubilee was designed to be celebrated every 50 years and was intended to bring about the forgiveness of debts and a new start to the people of God. That is what would happen when the people were allowed to return from their exile.
- Prophetically, Isaiah prophesized the release of all mankind from the bondage of sin through faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Brokenhearted** refers to the inner state of people in bondage to sin: their hearts and minds that are unable to change out of their own volition.
- **Captives** and **those who are bound** refers to the outer state of people in bondage to sin, their inability to change their behavior, their circumstances and way of life.

Jesus delivers from both the inner and outer states that sin imposes on our lives. Jesus is a deliverer.

The Messiah would proclaim the truth about the effects of sin: **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;**

- **Year** appears to refer again to the year of Jubilee. It speaks of the forgiveness, grace and mercy available to those who put their faith in God's Messiah. **The Lord's favor** is real for those who receive Him.
- There is another side to Isaiah's message. The **day of vengeance**. This **day of vengeance** is contrasted with the **year of the Lord's favor**. While God's grace and mercy are real, His vengeance (His punishment, His correction, His discipline) is also very real. It was the reason for the exilic period that the Judeans experienced under the Babylonians. It is the reason that our sin separates us from our holy God, a condition in which we would exist for eternity except that God acts through the entirety of the Christ event to redeem us from our sin. His vengeance is short term for those who come to Him in faith. It is eternal for those who refuse His divine grace. Throughout the Bible, God makes clear the concepts of grace and judgment, just as He does here in this verse.

The Messiah would be a comforter: **to comfort all who mourn.**

- **Comfort** was a repeated theme in the messages God proclaimed to His people through the prophet Isaiah, especially in chapter 40-66. As I've said, repeatedly, was originally meant for the people of Judah who would be brought from exile back to Jerusalem. Such was the message of Isaiah 40:1-2: **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.**
- But Isaiah's message of comfort would be for all times and for all people who turn to Christ. Jesus, Himself said, **Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted**, Matthew 5:4.

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Verse 3 describes in figurative forms how that comfort is manifested.

Isaiah 61:3

**to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.**

- The picture presented here is of a person clothed in sack cloth and ashes and whose faint spirit is likely the result of fasting or their difficult circumstances. It indicates someone who is in great need, who is in deep despair.
- It is the picture of someone who has come to the end of themselves and their own resources and who has turned to God for help.
- They turn to God because they realize that only God can provide what they need in their lives and God responds.
- God responds by granting and giving specific gifts as indicated by the phrases **to grant** and **to give**. What the Messiah grants and gives is described in the verses that follow.
- **To those who mourn.** Isaiah in continuing to explain the concept of the Messiah as a comforter. He comforts those who mourn.
- **In Zion.** This is a reference to the exiles who identified with Zion, another name for Jerusalem, as their homeland. It is a reference to lost mankind who may or may not realize that they have a homeland in heaven if they would but respond to Christ.

The next three phrases describe what the Messiah gives to His people. They are simple but profound: The first is **a beautiful headdress instead of ashes**.

- The phrase **a beautiful headdress instead of ashes** in the English Standard Version is **beauty for ashes** in the King James Version. The reason is that traditionally, when someone was mourning in sack cloth and ashes, the ashes were placed upon one's head. Ashes suggest loss, destruction, ugliness, being brought low. The work of the Messiah is to replace the ashes on the head with something beautiful, thus **a beautiful headdress**. Some commentators suggest the headdress is a crown, signifying being raised up to an exalted state. It reminds us of the **crown of life** that Jesus promises to those who are faithful unto death in Revelation 2:10. It implies a state of exaltation that comes to the believer not because of anything he or she has done but because of the grace of the Lord Jesus. **A beautiful headdress** or **beauty for ashes** reminds of the chorus from that Bill Gaither song, Something Beautiful:
“Something beautiful, something good
All my confusion He understood
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife
But He made something beautiful of my life”
Beauty for ashes: a gift from the Messiah.

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The second is **the oil of gladness instead of mourning.**

- **The oil of gladness** has several related implications. The reference to **oil** reminds us of the anointing that was reserved in the Bible for prophets, priests and kings and is associated specifically with the Messiah, Himself. But here, the Anointed One anoints those to whom he ministers. Anointing with oil was used not only to set aside a person for a special task; it was also used for healing purposes. The Messiah, the Anointed One, anoints those who mourn and doing so, He heals them, turning their mourning into gladness. The scriptures we read and the hymns we sing that tell the story of the birth of the Messiah overflow with the concept of gladness, of joy:
To the shepherds of Bethlehem, the angel of the Lord declared, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)
And so we sing:
“Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King.”
And,
“Joyful, joyful we adore You, God of glory, Lord of love.”
That joy, that **gladness**, is extended to those who mourn for God’s work in their lives. God will anoint every believer with the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the seal of His ownership of us and His guarantee to all His promises to us. Joy is the second of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Ephesians 5:22-3. Joy is a key element signifying the work of God in a believer’s life. **Gladness instead of mourning:** a gift from the Messiah.

The third gift is **the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit**

- The reference to a **garment of praise** reminds us of Jesus’ parable in Matthew 22:1-14. In that parable, a great king hosts a wedding feast where all who were invited were given wedding garments, a sign of their welcome inclusion in that special event. A key point in the parable is that one guest, who somehow appeared at the feast without the required garment, was cast out into outer darkness. Having the correct garment is a sign of inclusion. This also reminds us of Revelation 3:5 where Jesus says that **the one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.** The **garment of praise** speaks of our inclusion in the family of God through faith in Christ.
- The concept of **praise** is important. This is in contrast to the faint spirit of those who mourn. Praise is a natural response to what God does for us in giving us eternal life. But it is more than a mere response to the Messiah’s goodness. It is our own gift back to God. Hebrews 13:15 urges us to **continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.**

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The final two lines of verse 3 describe the end result of this comforting work of the Messiah in the lives of His people:

**that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.**

- **they may be called** – those who experience this transformation (from mourning to comfort, from despair to exaltation, from sadness to joy) are given descriptive names that describe this transformation.
 - **oaks of righteousness**
 - The oak tree was and is a symbol of strength and durability.
 - Through the righteousness of God that He imparts, the believer is made strong and durable, able to face the challenges of this life.
 - **the planting of the Lord**
 - This reminds us of the activity of God in the Garden of Eden.
 - This also reminds us of the blessed man in Psalm 1:3:
**He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.**
Both of these ideas point to the idea of the care that those who are in Christ receive from their Lord.

Great is the ministry of the Messiah and great are His gifts to His people, but something greater awaits those who receive those gifts: the glorification of the one who gave them.

- **that he** (God and His Christ) **may be glorified.** This is exactly as it should be and exactly as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:14-16: **“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

The person described in Isaiah 61:1-3 is the Christ whose coming we celebrate at Christmas and to whom we offer our praise and worship Sunday by Sunday, and, hopefully, day by day. This passage describes the ministry that Jesus read about and declared as his own in Luke 4 as he began His public ministry. One has only to read the Gospels to know that these are the very things Jesus did as he fulfilled these words of prophecy and accomplished the Father’s will with his every word and act. But notice for a moment how Jesus ended His public ministry on earth. John 20:21-22 describes Jesus’ appearance to His disciples in the upper room after His resurrection. There Jesus said to them, **As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**

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Let me say that again: **As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.** Then Jesus breathed on them and said, **Receive the Holy Spirit.** In doing this, Jesus commissioned those first disciples to do the very work he had been doing. He empowered them to continue that work by anointing them with the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit who enabled Him to accomplish what the Father had asked Him to do.

But that call to service did not end with those first disciples. Every Christian, every person who puts faith in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord receives the Holy Spirit. Every believer is commissioned by God to let the Spirit of God work through them to carry on the work of Christ today.

Isaiah 61:1-3 describes the Spirit anointed ministry of Jesus, but it also describes the Spirit anointed work that Jesus wants to do through you and me. I am often move to tears as I think about the honor God has bestowed on us as believers. We are preachers and proclaimers of the good news of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. We have the honor of sharing Jesus with brokenhearted people and watching Jesus bind up, to heal, their wounds.

We have the honor of helping Jesus deliver those who are prisoners of sin as we share the truths of the gospel with them. To those who sit in the ash heap of life, to those who mourn and to those who are filled with the spirit of despair, we have the honor of sharing the comfort of Jesus.

We have the honor of planting the seed of the word of God in peoples' lives and watching it grow them into oaks of righteousness, resulting in praise to our God. Such was and is the ministry of Christ. Such is the ministry God allows for you and me. Let us be faithful to carry it out for His honor and praise.

James Sanders