



**T**oday's Gospel reading combines two separate passages taken from the Gospel of Luke. First we hear the opening verses of the Gospel where Luke mentions the purpose of his Gospel: to provide certainty to the teachings his readers had received. We learn that Luke may have written the Gospel to a specific person, Theophilus.

The word Theophilus may also mean "Dear Reader." In Greek, the word Theophilus translates as "lover of God."

After the first four verses from Chapter 1, today's Gospel reading skips several chapters to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Chapter 4. In this second part of today's Gospel, we hear that Jesus is acting with the power of the Spirit and is in His hometown of Nazareth, attending the synagogue on the Sabbath. It was customary for the Jews to go to the synagogue on Sabbath day. We will continue to read from Luke's Gospel in the coming Sundays. He was a physician and a traveling companion mentioned three times by St. Paul in his letters.

In the first reading, we find Nehemiah reading the Scripture to the people of Israel who had just returned from exile. The Jews were freed from their Babylonian exile and were allowed to return to their homeland by the king of Persia. The king appointed Nehemiah the governor of Israel to help the Israelites to rebuild their cities and their civilization. In an effort to rebuild the nation, Nehemiah started with what was most important, their faith in God and repentance. He appointed Ezra the priest to read the scriptures to them. The Israelites were able to hear the Word of God for the first time in their own land after all those years of exile. They could not hold back their tears, and everyone began to weep.

In the Gospel of today, we find Jesus in the synagogue reading from the Scripture. Jesus was a faithful, observant Jew. The temple in Jerusalem was run by priests who were part of the tribe of Levi, sons of Aaron, ordained to offer sacrifice. But, the synagogues were largely a lay movement. You didn't have to be a priest to read the Scripture and preach in the synagogue. There was no sacrifice

involved in synagogue worship. The synagogue service consisted of praises of God, scripture reading and preaching.

Jesus was a Jewish layman—and a rabbi or teacher. As Jesus came up to read, He was given the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. When He read, the eyes of all looked intently at Him. When Nehemiah read, the people were moved to tears. It touched the hearts of the people. They were overcome by strong feelings and emotions. Do you take time to read the Bible? Do you allow the word of God to touch your hearts? God speaks to you through the Scripture. Do you allow the Word of God to transform your lives? Word of God demands changes to our lives.

What Jesus read that day from Isaiah defined His ministry. It was originally a passage where God promised hope and redemption to the people in exile. Jesus applies that to Himself. Jesus' ministry included bringing glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, healing to the sick, freedom to the oppressed, and proclaiming a year acceptable to the Lord.

Through this text from Isaiah, Jesus announced God's salvation. The "year acceptable to the Lord" is a reference to the Jewish tradition of a "jubilee year." A year of Jubilee was celebrated every 50th year. It was a year of renewal in which debts were forgiven and slaves were freed. Jesus came to set people free from the bondage of sin. He proclaimed a time of God's mercy. Jesus not only announced God's salvation but also brought this salvation. Jesus is the Anointed One, filled with the Spirit of God. The Kingdom of God is made present in Jesus, in His life, death, and Resurrection. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so that the Kingdom of God can be fulfilled.

Today we are given the task of continuing the mission that Jesus began. Jesus set the framework for all of us when He announced His ministry in today's Gospel. Jesus also gave us the helper we would need to enable us to continue His mission. It is the Spirit that led Jesus in His ministry. The Holy Spirit has been given to us so that we, the Church, might serve the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' gift to the Church. The Holy Spirit enables the Church to continue the mission of Jesus. Let us not hide the Spirit. Let the Spirit move us, and lead us into places where we would not otherwise go. When we do what Jesus did—serving the poor and the needy, giving food to the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, forgiving those who have hurt us—we serve the Kingdom of God.