

READING I *Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10*

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. Standing at one end of the open place that was before the *Water Gate*, he read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion. He opened the scroll so that all the people might see it—for he was standing higher up than any of the people—; and, as he opened it, all the people rose. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, “Amen, amen!” Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD, their faces to the ground. Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. Then *Nehemiah*, that is, His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-scribe and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all the people: “Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep”—for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He said further: “Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15 (see John 6:63c)*

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple. R.

The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye. R.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just. R.

Let the words of my mouth and the thought
of my heart
find favor before you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. R.

READING II *1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27*

Longer: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Brothers and sisters: As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. You are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

GOSPEL *Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21*

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, / because he has anointed me / to bring glad tidings to the poor. / He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives / and recovery of sight to the blind, / to let the oppressed go free, / and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

Practice of Faith

The first reading from Nehemiah recounts the remarkable day five hundred years before the birth of Christ when Ezra read the book of the law (the Torah) to all of Jerusalem. The people, having just returned from their long exile, wept with gratitude as the Word of God washed over them. ♦ Deepen your appreciation for the Word of God by exchanging insights with others in regular Bible study. This resource is a great start. Another resource to explore is the popular podcast "The Bible in a Year," with Fr. Mike Schmitz (ascensionpress.com/bibleinayear). ♦ The passage Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah in his home synagogue is sometimes described as his mission statement. Prayerfully reflect on the words Jesus proclaimed from the scroll and consider how he fulfilled them. ♦ The Church celebrates the Memorial of St. John Bosco this week on January 31. In the spirit of John Bosco, patron saint of children, make a gift to or offer to assist a local agency dedicated to the care of underserved children.

Download more questions and activities for families, Christian initiation groups, and other adult groups at <https://www.ltp.org/ahw>.

Scripture Insights

Luke knew the power of words. Only in Luke's Gospel can one find parables such as the prodigal son or the good Samaritan. Luke also relates Jesus' words of challenge to disciples such as Martha, good people who had let their concerns come before divine teaching. Even Luke's resurrection accounts portray Jesus as a preacher and teacher (Luke 24:6-8; 25-27; 44-47). In Luke's mind, Jesus' primary role as Messiah was to transform humanity through his message.

This is the context for today's Gospel reading. A sense of expectation pervades the narrative. Although the official Judaism of Jesus' day did not speak of a messiah, a hope for such a savior was common in popular religion. Some expected a new Moses, who would lead Israel in fulfilling God's Law (Deuteronomy 18:15). Some expected a king (Ezekiel 34:22-24). Still others expected a skilled warrior with supernatural power (Daniel 7:13-14). The synagogue congregation had heard of Jesus' mighty deeds elsewhere and came to see if he might fulfill their expectations.

They found a man with a message. God did not need warriors or lawgivers or kings, because the kingdom was already established. If people did not see it, that was because the anxieties of everyday life crowded out any awareness of it. They needed someone to reveal it to them. Freedom began the day they believed that God had acted to restore humanity's freedom, wholeness, hope, and joy. Jesus' message was simply to inspire faith that divine promises were now being fulfilled.

It was the right word at the right moment. People believed in Jesus, and their hope in a new and different world helped them find evidence of the kingdom everywhere. His disciples today must do the same, sharing our joy and freedom in such ways that all can come to believe that "Today the Scriptures are fulfilled in your hearing."

- ♦ Has anyone ever changed your life with the right word at the right moment?
- ♦ Has a text of Scripture ever affected your life deeply?
- ♦ What Gospel message might you be able share that will fill someone else with hope?