

We are looking today at an announcement -
an announcement about the Servant of the Lord.

John the Baptist was the one sent
to make the announcement.

But the roots of his message go way back
as we saw last week
to the prophets hundreds of years before.

God has promised his people
that despite their sad circumstances
and the low esteem they have among their neighbours

One day, God will put this right
they will be in the best of circumstances in every way
their neighbours will look up to them, even serve them
And God will send a special servant,
his anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ,
to make it all happen.

This is the Messianic Hope of the Jews
and they thought he might be some sort of warrior king
like King David of old
who would defeat their enemies in battle
and turn the tables
so that those they serve at present
one day will serve them.

That was not quite God's plan.
And Isaiah, and others, make this clear.
Isaiah 61 is one of those passages.

Waiting for Joy
A witness sent by God

3rd Sunday
of Advent

John 1. 6 - 8, 19 - 28
Isaiah 61. 1 - 4, 8 - 11

Last week we got a bit excited about Isaiah 40.

Well, Isaiah 61 is exciting too.

The words belong to a Servant of the Lord,
who is anointed by God's Spirit.

This is the Messiah speaking in a prophetic way
some hundreds of years before his arrival.

And he says what he will do.

The Lord has anointed me

- *to preach good news to the poor*
- *to bind up the broken-hearted*
- *to proclaim freedom for the captives*
- *and release from darkness for the prisoners*

If you are poor - this is good news

If you are broken-hearted - this is good news

If you are captive, or in darkness - this is good news.

And it goes on - beautiful poetic words

to comfort all who mourn

to bestow on them a crown of beauty

instead of ashes

the oil of gladness

instead of mourning

and a garment of praise

instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness

a planting of the Lord

for the display of his splendour.

If you want to know why my house is called "Acorns"
what else would you call
a "planting" of "oaks of righteousness"

It came to me, from this passage,
a few weeks before I moved to Skellingthorpe.

At the end of verse 9

*All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the Lord has blessed.*

What a vision for the People of God.
And what a message for the anointed Servant of the Lord.

There is lots more, all over Isaiah, and elsewhere
but this passage - Isaiah 61 - is the one Jesus chose
to declare his own ministry and identity
in his home synagogue at the start of his ministry
(in Luke 4)

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing

So here is the Bible's announcement
about the nature of this Messiah.

Now there is a puzzle about this bit of Isaiah.
And this is very important for us.

All down the ages, probably from when it was first spoken
the scholars have asked - "Who is Isaiah speaking about?"

Is it about himself?

Is it about a coming Messiah?

Is it about Israel?

Who is this "Servant of the Lord" "Ebed Jahweh"?

The answer usually comes out as - all three.

It is somewhat true of Isaiah,
and everyone called to speak God's word.

It is supremely true of the coming Messiah
who will give it more depth and meaning
than anyone ever thought
until it happened.

And it should be true of Israel, the people of God,
if they are truly serving God's will,
although they will fail.

This is why it is important for us.

We have seen it fulfilled in Jesus.

He brings release to the prisoner
and light to those in darkness
and he binds up the broken-hearted
in ways that could not be imagined before Easter.

But it is now fulfilled in his church - the people of God.
Because we have the same commission
as the first apostles
to go and do all this stuff
and to perform greater miracles
than Jesus did.

Because we have the anointing of God's Holy Spirit.

Easter and Pentecost released to the church
all this mandate - and the authority and power to do it.

Can you see why this is exciting?

We have the power to bind up the broken-hearted.
We, like John the Baptist, are not the Christ,
we are not important, except -
God has called us, and anointed us
to be his servants, his little messiahs,
bringing the same deliverance and victory
into a fallen, captive world
that I son darkness and despair and pain.

We have job to do - SAVE THE WORLD.

I heard a joke recently, about Mother Theresa
when she got to heaven, Peter welcomed her
and served her up with a plate of cold ham and salad.

She looked down to the other place
and saw that they had hot food, roasts and barbecues
and she asked Peter, why do they just have a cold meal.

Peter replied, well it not really worth cooking just for two.

Think about it.

Peter and Mother Theresa were the only two people
good enough to get to heaven.

because Mother Theresa was on the streets
saving the world, one by one,
and nobody else seems to measure up.
That's why it is funny - because it could be true.

Be thankful we are saved by Grace and not by Works.
be thankful it doesn't work like that
because we do all fail to measure up.

But it is no excuse.

As the church, as God's people,
we are called to be blessed by God
like Isaiah says
so that everyone who sees us will acknowledge
that we are "a people the Lord has blessed."

But we are also called, to be God's servants
taking his blessing to others.

We are called to be blessed
as we come together each week with each other
and as we come together with God
even more frequently.

But we are called also to be a blessing
as we go out in mission and service
carrying out that same agenda.

- *to preach good news to the poor*
- *to bind up the broken-hearted*
- *to proclaim freedom for the captives*
- *and release from darkness for the prisoners*

To be

oaks of righteousness
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendour

That is our life's mission.

Now that we belong to Jesus
that is what we are to do.

And we eat and work and play and pay the mortgage
so that we can do that.

That is our calling.

We, are precious to God
We, are anointed
to complete God's mission to the world.

We all know and meet people who meet these descriptions
Spiritually poor, broken-hearted
captive to sin, in spiritual darkness
grieving any number of different sorts of loss
in this fallen, and sometimes cruel world.

When you encounter such a person
do you have the confidence to speak
of the kingdom of God?

Do you have the faith to pray with them
and speak prophetically into their lives
of light, freedom, healing, release.

Is it true of your life? Are we witnesses to this truth.

Once again, the challenge of this time of year.

We look forward to celebrating at Christmas
that God came to our world, in Jesus.

Are we celebrating an historical event 2,000 years ago?

Are we rejoicing in the hope of something
yet to be fulfilled.

Or are we celebrating that Jesus is here now
He has made and is making a difference.
All the world should see.
And here in the church
is where they come to experience it.

That is the celebration of Christmas.

Christ has come. God is with us.

Is it true for you?

And are you making it true
in the bit of God's world where he has placed you?

A messianic challenge for each one of us.

Be anointed.
Bring light and deliverance, freedom and healing.
You and me. every day.

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Setting the Scene

I wonder if you have ever been mistaken for someone else.

Perhaps mistaken for someone more important than you.

What do you do - do you pretend you are and see where it gets you?
perhaps pretend, until you get caught out?

Once - a few years ago - I was asked by the Bishop to go to RAF Waddington for a big civic reception.

Lots of important people there the Chief Constable, the Mayor of Lincoln. MP's etc and the Bishop couldn't be there so he sent me - the local Rural Dean.

There are about 23 Rural Deans in Lincolnshire each having pastoral care for a while of about a dozen clergy. So we weren't ever so special, just a little bit, for a while.

But when someone spoke to me, they made a mistake and thought I was the Dean of Lincoln the most important clergyman in the Diocese, after the Bishop. An important person.

I had to confess - I was someone else less important not really important at all, although I was representing the Bishop. So they moved on and didn't talk to me.

Very humbling.

That's what happened to John the Baptist
in today's reading.

John came with a message and a ministry
that said - something important is about to happen.

And some people thought - he was the one -
the most important person, that they were waiting for.

He might have got away with it for a while.
But he came clean.

Are you the Christ?

No I am not.

Are you Elijah?

No I am not.

I am the one sent to prepare the way,
and the one coming - Jesus -
I am not even good enough to tie up his shoes.

But actually, John was an important person
because God loved him
and God had a job for him to do.
It was important for him to speak to the people
to which he had been sent.

So the question for us today is
Are you an important person?

You don't get a seat in the VIP (Club class) lounge
at the airport.

But are you important.

Part of the answer is - NO - Jesus is important and beside him, I am nothing.

But, God says, you are important, every one of us, because he knows you and loves you, and he has special work for you to do as well.

So who are you? Just another person among millions.

But you are also a child of God.

When the day comes when we go to heaven you will have a place among the best.

because your value in God's eyes is this you were bought - with the death of Jesus.

You are his precious child. Whatever the world says to you.

You, are as special to God, as the Bishop or the Dean of Lincoln.
You, are as special to God, as the Queen of England.

You, are a child of God. And he loves you.

God thinks you are special. You are precious.
And that is the truth.

More later, about John the Baptist.

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three candles [Advent - Hope.](#)

[Prophets - Peace](#)

[John the Baptist - Joy](#)

[Birthdays and presentations](#)

Testimony time, Collection.