

## THIRD SUNDAY OT

Today the Church gives us the very beginning of the Gospel according to Luke from which we will be reading throughout this Year C of the Sunday cycle of readings.

In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul refers to Luke as his "dear physician" who accompanied him during the second half of his missionary journeys and during his imprisonment in Rome.

Luke begins his Gospel by referring to other accounts of the events of the life and ministry of Jesus.

While he was in Rome with Paul, Luke may have met Mark, who is believed to have written the earliest Gospel.

It's unlikely that anyone was taking notes while Jesus preached or kept a diary of his movements.

Rather, as Luke explains, the words and actions of Jesus were handed down by word of mouth by eyewitnesses and by "ministers of the word" who proclaimed the narratives both liturgically and in catechetical settings.

Luke addresses this preface to his Gospel to "Theophilus," a name which means "loved by God" or "friend of God."

Perhaps "Theophilus" was the name of the patron for the publishing of Luke's Gospel, but the meaning of the name might suggest that Luke is addressing his Gospel to everyone, since everyone is loved by God - a major theme throughout Luke's Gospel.

All of this background material provides an interesting glimpse into how the Gospels came to be written.

Today's reading from Luke skips the infancy narrative, Jesus' Baptism, and his time in the desert.

We are brought to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as he visits the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth, on the Sabbath day.

The synagogue service consisted of songs, readings, psalms, and prayers, as well as a "sermon," much like our Liturgy of the Word at the beginning of Mass.

Once they reached a certain age (now called their Bar Mitzvah), any male Jew could read in the synagogue, taking turns or volunteering as Jesus did in today's Gospel.

There may have been prescribed readings for each week (as we have in our Lectionary), but on this occasion, when Jesus was handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, he searched for a particular passage.

He found the verses where the prophet sums up his mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."

Jesus himself was anointed at his Baptism in the Jordan River when the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove.

Jesus uses the words of Isaiah to describe his own mission: to proclaim glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and a time acceptable to the Lord.

Then Jesus says, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing," thus declaring that the promises made through the prophets are being accomplished through him.

As a companion to this Gospel, we have the First Reading from the Book of Nehemiah with its moving account of, another "liturgy of the word" which took place after the people of Israel had returned from exile.

The people are weeping because this was the first such public proclamation of God's Word in a very long time.

Ezra tells the people: "Today is holy to our Lord. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength."

This day was so significant to the Jewish people that it eventually became their New Year's Day, Rosh Hashanah.

Our Second Reading today continues St. Paul's theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit culminating in his beautiful analogy of the Body of Christ.

All of the baptized are united as members of Christ's Body, since we have all been given to drink of one Spirit.

Moreover, Paul emphasizes that as members of the one Body, we need each other.

We especially need to gather with one another each Sunday to listen to God's Word proclaimed and to celebrate the Eucharist.

As we gather we are being given an opportunity to reflect upon how the good news is being fulfilled in our hearing, in our living, and in our sharing.

We believe that Jesus is present among us in a very special way when we gather here in church for the sharing of his Word and Sacrament.

These precious moments are holy to the Lord; all of them are sources of rejoicing.