

Celebrate the Jubilee of our Anointed One!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This time of year, a lot of people are doing a lot of celebrating. Christmas parties at work, at church, at home. Then shortly after are all the New Years Eve parties. It's a season of celebration! When we celebrate, we have a reason for celebrating, don't we? We celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, graduations, and even things like closing a big deal at work. Have you ever been at a celebration where you didn't feel much like celebrating? Maybe you went to a wedding but you really weren't that close to the bride and groom. At the reception, *they're* having fun celebrating, but you're just not into it. If you were present at a Muslim holiday, you might not feel much like celebrating since your beliefs are very different. And this time of year when so many are celebrating, there are some who do not. Our many members that work in or near the medical profession will tell you that suicides and suicide attempts spike this time of years.

In our worship service today, we are celebrating something special. It's something that many people in this world would not celebrate. We today celebrate the jubilee of our Anointed One. What?! What does that mean? Isn't a jubilee usually a 50th anniversary of some sort? And who is this Anointed One?

Before us today is a prophecy spoken by Isaiah. What makes these words unusual is that is that the Messiah himself speaks these words... 700 years before he was ever born in Bethlehem. Listen to the first part of the text, and see if you can pick out what we are celebrating.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion."

700 years before he was born, the Savior says through the prophet: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me... the Lord has anointed me." The word "Messiah" is a Hebrew word... and it means, "The Anointed One." The word "Christ" is a Greek word, and it also means "Anointed One." When we identify Jesus as the Messiah or Christ, we are calling him the Anointed One. That is exactly what he calls himself in these Words from Isaiah.

In Old Testament times, anointing with oil was the means by which a person was set apart to perform a special service for God's people on God's behalf. The kings of Israel were anointed. The prophets were too. And so were the priests. All anointed with oil in a ritual which set them apart for dedicated service to God's people on God's behalf.

Jesus was the Anointed One foretold for centuries. But he was not anointed with oil. He was anointed with the "Spirit of the Sovereign Lord."

Do you know when this took place? When Jesus was baptized, "heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him." In an outward visible form, the Spirit was seen descending on Jesus. This was his anointing. This is when he was set apart for special service to God's people on God's behalf. The prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled.

And now, let's look at the reasons we have to celebrate. The reasons to celebrate are conveyed in series of vivid word pictures. The first: **"The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."** The Messiah is one who bring spiritual, eternal blessings. So the

“poor” here isn’t literally those with little money. The “poor” are those who are poor in spirit. When you look at our righteousness, we’re not rich and finely dressed. We are dirt poor, wearing filthy rags. Martin Luther described our condition by saying that before God, we are beggars. Because of our sin, we have nothing of value we can bring to God.

But the reason for celebration? The Anointed One, the Christ, brings good news to the poor. He has a message for them to bring them hope, joy and peace.

The next word pictures help us see what that message was about. The Messiah comes to **“heal the brokenhearted.”** Brokenhearted means “one who is troubled or disturbed in heart, one whose heart or conscience gives him no rest.” Are you brokenhearted? Are you disturbed by your sins? If not, pause from your busy schedule and distracted, frantic life and really think about what you have done and thought and said in the past week or so. Have you and your spouse exchanged some words that would make Jesus sad? Have you wasted time on things that have no real importance? Have you lost your temper? Failed to be generous? Forgotten to pray? The list could go on and on. Stop and think. And your heart will break.

But the reason for us to celebrate today? Christ came to heal the brokenhearted! He forgives our sin and removes our guilt. Our broken hearts are healed and made new.

The next word picture says Christ has come **“to proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.”** What a vivid description of sin. Sin makes us captive. When we sin we do what Satan wants. Every sin committed is another chain tying you to Satan himself. Sinning proves he has control over our lives, and we’re not free. We are in prison, and it’s one from which we can never free ourselves. Sin puts us on death row, and there are no appeals. And worst of all, the death we face is eternal separation from God in the horrors of hell.

But we have reason to celebrate because our Anointed One, the Christ, comes to proclaim freedom and release from darkness! Christ paid the ransom price to set you free from you captors. He paid with his holy precious blood when he died on the cross. The chains are broken. The prison door swing open as bright light streams in. In Christ you are free! With all these pictures we see how Christ completely turns our life around and ushers in a whole new era! This is reason to celebrate!

The next word picture states that Christ comes **“to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** Isaiah’s first audience would have heard these words and would have recognized a reference to the Year of Jubilee. Those who attended Bible class last weekend know that the Year of Jubilee was something Israel was to celebrate only once every 50 years. When that year came, all *debts* were forgiven, all *slaves* were freed and all inheritance land was returned to its original owner. The past was forgiven and forgotten. Everyone had a new beginning.

What an amazing celebration that year must have been! In Christ, 2008 was a year of God’s favor... a year of Jubilee when God forgave our debts and we were set free from slavery and God promised again that there is a Promised Land in heaven that belongs to us. And here’s the really good news. You don’t have to wait another 50 years for another Year of Jubilee... for another year of God’s favor. Because God has promised 2009 will be another one. And 2010... and every year after. In Christ Jesus, *every* year is a year of Jubilee!

What great comfort and assurance we have! What great reason to celebrate. What vivid images to take home in our mind! So much more vivid than, “Jesus saves you.” But you poor person clothed in tattered rags and the filth of sin. You have a glorious new garment of righteousness in Christ. You were on death row waiting for execution when eternity in hell began... you’ve been declared “not guilty!” and set free! The inheritance we lost because of our rebellion against God our Father has now been restored by Christ our Redeemer. Great news! Let’s celebrate!

That’s just what we’re encouraged to do in the next verses: The Anointed One, Jesus Christ, was sent 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. I delight greatly**

in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

Burdened with sin and guilt, there is no reason to celebrate. The imagery in our text envisions a person mourning, grieving, depressed... wearing sackcloth and ashes... because all joy and delight is gone from light. But now look how our Anointed One, the Christ, clothes us. The clothes of grief and mourning are replaced with new garments of joy and celebration. We're decked out in wedding garments. We're dressed like a bride for her wedding day, wearing the most beautiful clothes. No more sackcloth and ashes. No more mourning. Only the wardrobe of jubilation and celebration is suitable!

What a difference God has made in our lives through our Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ! He has completely turned us around. He has blessed us by giving us the very opposite of what we deserved. Freedom, riches, an eternal inheritance! Let's celebrate! Are you ready?

But how? How do we celebrate? Our response is described in the last part of the text: **“For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.”** And then back in verse 3 it said, **“They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”** And so we see one more word picture, don't we? Think of springtime with plants sprouting, flowers blooming, and trees budding. Nothing lifts the mood then to walk outside on a warm spring day, breathe the fresh air and look at the new life and new beauty appearing.

Likewise, our hearts have been planted, fertilized and watered with the Good News of Christ. And what happens? **“The Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.”** Good works to praise our Savior spontaneously come sprouting up out of our lives. Kind and encouraging words come in full bloom. Buds begin to form all over the place of thoughts that are good, noble, right and praiseworthy. Here and now, in the middle of winter we are enjoying springtime in the Lord... a springtime of new life and beauty. A springtime that others around us will surely notice.

Friends, we *have* to celebrate, don't we? We know too much to keep quiet. The joy swells up inside us and it needs an outlet. We have to share. We have to love. So how can we, this Christmas season, let that praise to God in our hearts blossom and bloom?

Why not do something intentional and deliberate this Christmas season that brings glory to God. So much attention is misfocused on lights and shopping and parties and a jolly man in red with a beard. Let's change our focus from the North Pole to Bethlehem. Instead of getting caught up in giving and getting gifts, let's remember first and foremost the greatest gift given... God's beloved Son. Take some time each day to reflect on the Anointed one...the Christ's... coming and what it means to you.

In addition, might we all expand our “gifts to give” list this year? One year there was a family opening a mountain of presents that were under the Christmas tree. They were excited and talking about all the gifts received and showing them to one another. But then the youngest boy in the family, a five year old, happened to see the manger scene under the Christmas tree. He looked for a few seconds, then scanned all the presents and wrapping paper around the room, then asked, “Whose birthday is this, anyway?” Then he announced that he wanted to give something to Baby Jesus.

Might we do the same this Christmas? Might we give a special gift to Jesus this year in honor of his birthday. A gift to reflect our thankfulness for the complete change Jesus has made in our lives. A gift to celebrate this Year of Jubilee... this year of God's favor. Prayerfully consider how you will celebrate in the coming days... and in the coming year. Think of how best to celebrate your freedom, your forgiven sins, your eternal inheritance! So much to celebrate! We better begin! Amen. *On earth, peace is yours. On you God's favor rests. Amen*