

Biblical Background

LUKE 4:21-30

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: Nazareth is a city in the region of Galilee, set on a hill along a ridge that overlooks the fertile Jezreel Valley. It was a village in the time of Jesus that was made of stone houses. Jesus was raised here by his parents and trained to be a general contractor or Teknon in Greek. A Teknon is someone who could build with any sort of materials including stone and wood. He was more than a carpenter. Nazareth had a synagogue, one of the seven, located within its vicinity. Jesus grew up in that community and would be well known to all in the village.

TERMS: Synagogue There are seven synagogues in the region of Galilee. The purpose of the synagogue was to provide a place where Jewish men and women could meet to hear the Word of God (the Torah and Prophets). They would be read to from a scroll and then listen to commentary given by the person who did the reading. There were only seven synagogues in Galilee in the time of Jesus, because the Temple was up and operational in Jerusalem. When the Temple is destroyed by Rome in AD 70 the number of synagogues in the Jewish world expands quickly.

Signs John mentions that during the public ministry of Jesus he will perform seven specific signs. Each sign will reveal more fully that he is the Messiah. Some of the other signs include the healing of the paralytic in Chapter 5 and the raising of Lazarus in Chapter 11.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS: We know that Jesus would have been seen as a person of high regard because he was offered the opportunity to read the Word of the Prophet Isaiah and then comment upon the meaning of the passage. People had to be carefully trained to be able to read the Hebrew text. A scroll would have to be read by unrolling it to the passage to be proclaimed. There is no punctuation in ancient Hebrew - just block capital letters. Therefore, readers would have to be quite clever to find their way to the text they were supposed to read. And only two errors in pronunciation were allowed and then the reader would be asked to sit down. Jesus would have read the text with a confident authority. One of the Dead Sea scrolls discovered in 1947 is a complete scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. When unrolled it measures to 36 feet! That is a lot of material to work through to find the passage that Jesus read and commented upon.

INSIGHTS INTO MEANING: That "eyes looked intently on him," suggests that Jesus read the text with new power and insight, and those gathered were anxious to hear what he had to say about the text. His comments on the content of the scripture are next week's Gospel.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Talk about "wholehearted, magical faith" as a family. What are its qualities? When have you seen it exercised in your family? What have been the rewards?

CHARACTER QUALITIES: TRUST & RISK

ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Learn more about St. Nicholas as a bishop. What did he do to become so famous? How do people celebrate St. Nicholas in other countries? How do we follow his example, by giving selflessly and abundantly, to make the dreams, needs, and wishes of others to come true? As a family make a "giving list". Come up with ways that you can give abundantly to others in the year ahead, recognizing God as the ultimate giver. What are some ways that you can become God-like (or Santa-like) through providing for others unexpectedly!

CYCLE C 5TH SUNDAY
ORDINARY TIME

Living Grace

"WHOLEHEARTED, MAGICAL FAITH"



On a Christmas Eve many years ago, a boy lies in bed listening for the bells of Santa's sleigh, which he has been told by a friend do not exist. Later that night he hears not bells, but a very different sound. He looks out his window and is astounded to see a steam engine parked in front of his house! The conductor invites him to board the Polar Express, a train filled with children on their way to the North Pole. The train takes the children to the center of the city, where Santa and the elves have gathered for the giving of the first gift of Christmas. The boy is chosen to receive this first gift. Knowing that he can choose anything in the world, he decides on a simple gift: one silver bell from Santa's sleigh. Santa cuts a bell from a reindeer's harness, and the delighted boy slips it into his bathrobe pocket as the clock strikes midnight, and the reindeer pull the sleigh into the sky. When the children return to the train, the boy realizes the bell has fallen through a hole in his pocket. Heartbroken, he is returned to his home. In the morning, his little sister finds one small box with the boy's name on it among the presents. Inside is the silver bell! The boy and his sister are enchanted by its beautiful sound, but their parents cannot hear it. The boy continues to believe in the spirit of Christmas and is able to hear the sweet ringing of the bell even as an adult.

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



VOCATION OF ANDREW AND PETER

*Illuminated Manuscript Miniature painted by Sano di Pietro, 15th Century
Duomo Piccolomini Library ~ Siena, Italy*

EXPLORING THE ART:

Illuminated manuscripts are small portable books popular in Medieval Europe that were created with calligraphy text on pages decorated with fancy initials, elaborate borders, and miniature illustrations. They were actually copied and painted by hand for over 1,000 years before the invention of printing. Unlike larger manuscripts held in monasteries or churches, these prayer books were created for individual, private devotion. The level of decoration and detail ranged from simple decoration in mass-produced examples, to ornate examples commissioned by the wealthy (as above). One of the most famous of these small manuscripts is the Book of Hours which contained the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours) which was recited in monasteries. It was developed for lay people who wished to incorporate elements of monasticism into their devotional life. Today, the gold and precious pigments of these ancient illuminated manuscripts are often as fresh and vibrant as they were when first applied to the pages, making them some of the richest and best preserved repositories of medieval and Renaissance painting, and offer the largest resource for the study of artists' materials and techniques in Europe from the 6th to the 16th century.

THE ILLUSTRATED WORD

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 5:1-11

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.

He saw two boats there alongside the lake;

the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets.

Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon,

he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore.

Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon,

"Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch."

Simon said in reply,

"Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets."

When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.

They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them.

They came and filled both boats

so that the boats were in danger of sinking.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him,

and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

Read-aloud video link:

THE POLAR EXPRESS

Written & Illustrated by Chris Van Allsburg

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

FOLLOWING JESUS IS A CALL TO BELIEF AND ACTION. WHEN ANSWERED, MAGIC FOLLOWS IN ABUNDANCE!

In today's Gospel story we hear about the disciples' initiation into becoming disciples, followers of Jesus. The story begins with Jesus teaching the crowds. It seems as if the guys just keep on fishing, instead of listening to Jesus. They are most likely concerned about providing for their families and making sure their day is fruitful. They had worked hard all day and night and still had not caught any fish. Jesus enlists their help in addressing the crowds, and they willing assist. As Jesus finishes teaching, he turns to Peter to invite his participation in faith. "Put out your net, and you will have all that you need." Peter at first resists and then reluctantly complies. The boat begins to sink in abundance. All his needs are met and then some.

Christmas is a time of magical abundance in our culture. Even when there is an economic recession, it doesn't keep people from wanting to give to one another. Giving brings magic and provision into each other's lives. We give to our family members, and many take the next step beyond by giving to the community as well. In *The Polar Express*, Chris Allsburg invites us into a relationship of belief and magic. Our belief in Santa Claus is very much tied into the belief of a "benevolent giver". For Peter and the boy in the story, and for many people today, culture tells us not to believe. Some of the men that witnessed this miracle did not choose to follow Jesus. Peter received the invitation to believe, and so did the boy in the story. Both Peter and the boy took a step into the unknowing. After a long hard day putting the nets out, Peter does it once more? The boy jumps on a train bound for the North Pole in the middle of the night? What makes them different from the others?

"There is no Santa' my friend had insisted, but I knew he was wrong", thought the boy in the story. Peter says to Jesus, "Because you say so, I will let down the nets". Both Peter and the boy were chosen and invited to believe. The strength of their hearts and the risk of their actions, magically brought "fish that filled the boats so full that they began to sink", and "Santa marched over to us and he pointed to me I knew I could have any gift I could imagine, what I wanted more than anything was one silver bell from Santa's sleigh." Both the boy and Peter wonder in their astonishment, "How can this be?"

God wants us to know that we will be rewarded for the risks we take in choosing to follow him. We will be rewarded with a life of such great abundance, we won't be able to hold it all. Sometimes we take for granted, the magic of God's providence all around us - the way a seed opens in the dirt to magically provide us with the food and nourishment that we need; the love that we share around the table as our family wakes up in the morning each day; the presence of God we feel when we walk outside, look up at the sun, and feel a gentle breeze on our face.

How do we love and support those with unique gifts around us? How might we work to appreciate that each of God's children are like snowflakes, made uniquely with great love and care? How can we help our children to be more aware and supportive of the unique and exceptional gifts in others and in our own family? How might we ourselves find the courage to follow God's spirit from within, trusting that we each have a gift to give?

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: What does your family do to celebrate Christmas Eve? What kind of thoughts and feelings do you experience on Christmas Eve? What is it that you are watching and waiting for?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: Santa is the "benevolent giver" for all Christian countries. What values does his love and generosity teach us? How does Santa call forth belief in the young and old?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How did Jesus call forth belief in Peter and the fishermen? Jesus called Peter to participation, and the conductor called the boy to participation. What did they have to do in order to experience the magic of belief? What happened after the boy and Peter accepted their invitations to believe? How did they experience magic and abundance? They both responded at first with hesitation and then with trust. What did onlookers observe to be happening? How did it affect those people? Were they changed, too? How?

How are we called to invite others into the magic of belief? What helps people believe in our experience? How do we keep "hearing the bell ring" even when others can't? Should we learn to trust our inner experiences of God over what others tell us? What can strengthen us to believe and receive, and to keep the magic alive?