

# 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:** Can you identify someone that you know who has a gift or insight that might only be fully understood in the future? How can you make an effort to offer encouragement and appreciation? Talk about the term "prophetic voices". Do you have a new understanding of what this means?

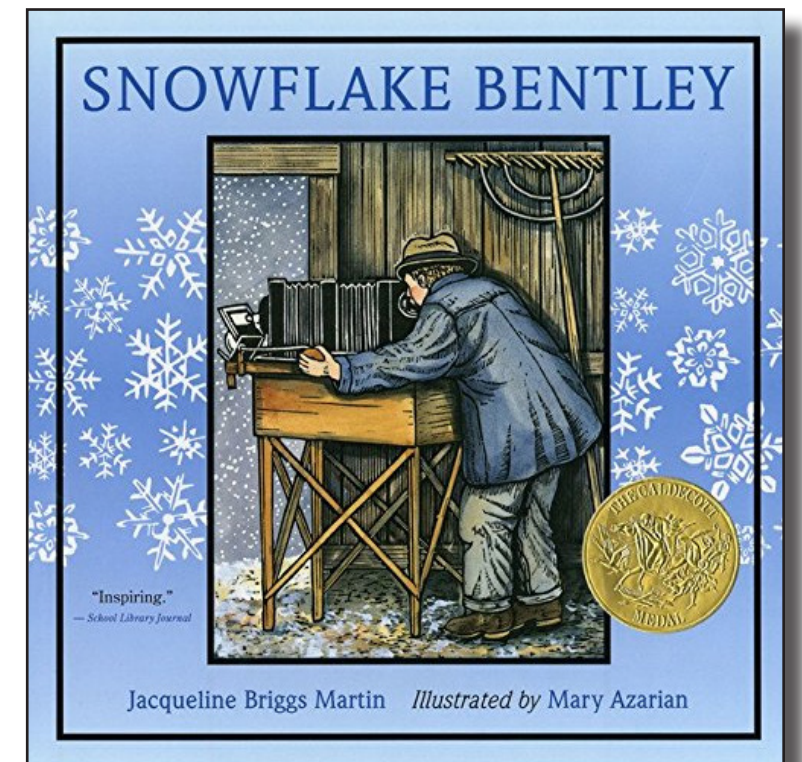
**CHARACTER QUALITIES:** TOLERANCE FOR UNIQUENESS  
FOLLOWING GOD'S LEADINGS

**ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Make a collage of people that made unique contributions to the world. As a family, talk about the way their contributions have made the world a better place for those who came after them. Who are the people who have been "prophetic voices" in your lifetime? Your parents' lifetime? Your grandparents' lifetimes?

CYCLE C 4TH SUNDAY  
ORDINARY TIME

# Living Grace

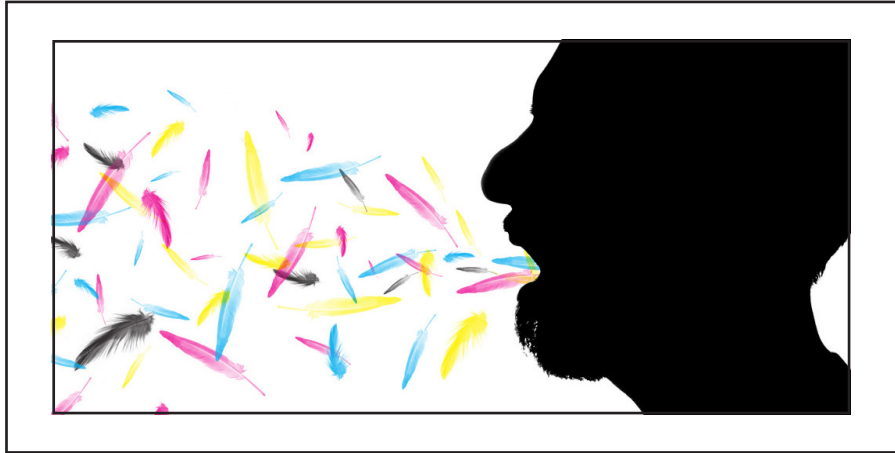
"DARING TO STAND OUT FOR OTHERS"



*Snowflake Bentley* tells the true story of the first known snowflake photographer, Wilson Bentley. From the time he was a small boy in Vermont, Wilson saw snowflakes as small miracles, and he determined that one day his camera would capture for others the wonder of the tiny crystal. Bentley's enthusiasm for photographing snowflakes was often misunderstood in his time, as many people had no interest in what he was up to, but his patience and determination revealed two important truths: no two snowflakes are alike, and each one is startlingly beautiful. This story gives us insight into a soul who had a scientist's vision and perseverance, and whose love of snow and careful camera work, expanded both natural science and photography.

# Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION  
OF SACRED ART



*GUARDING WORDS AND ACTIONS*  
Photograph by Stephen Poff, 2009

## EXPLORING THE ART:

## FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD

This image is based on the concept of "Guarding Words And Actions" meaning that we should mind what we say and do, for the consequences of even the smallest things, can be very significant. What we say and do can have a big impact for good or for ill, and it is our responsibility to make sure that what comes out of our mouths, comes from our hearts. Our faith helps us work on healing our hearts, so that what comes out of our mouths is filled with the Spirit of God. It is so hard to avoid "going along with the crowd" if we don't keep clarity in our minds and peace in our hearts.

To create this image, the artist used a photography technique called "strobism" which uses small flashes of light in manual mode off camera to achieve different styles of lighting effects. He used his own silhouette by firing these small flashes of light against a white wall behind him, and keeping himself much further in the foreground, out of the light. He then created the feathers in the background using a digital brush on a computer.

This piece of art was originally chosen to represent Jesus' speak, but look how nicely it ties into the photography aspect of our children's book, Snowflake Bentley!

# Sunday Gospel

LUKE 4:21-30

Jesus began speaking in the synagogue, saying:

"Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

And all spoke highly of him

and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?"

He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb,

'Physician, cure yourself,' and say,

'Do here in your native place

the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'"

**And he said, "Amen, I say to you,**

**no prophet is accepted in his own native place.**

Indeed, I tell you,

there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah

when the sky was closed for three and a half years

and a severe famine spread over the entire land.

It was to none of these that Elijah was sent,

but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon.

Again, there were many lepers in Israel

during the time of Elisha the prophet;

yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

When the people in the synagogue heard this,

they were all filled with fury.

They rose up, drove him out of the town,

and led him to the brow of the hill

on which their town had been built,

to hurl him down headlong.

But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away.

Read-aloud video link:

**SNOWFLAKE BENTLEY**

Written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin & Illustrated by Mary Azarian

## Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

**HONORING OUR LOVED ONES WHO MAKE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORLD... OR NOT!?**

In the Gospel and our children's story this week, Jesus and Snowflake Bentley both followed their inner inspirations to call forth their unique God-given gifts. Many did not understand what was driving them, especially those that were in closest proximity. In the gospel story, Luke tells us that Jesus' community is initially "wowed" by him. They knew he was the son of Joseph the carpenter, and while the normal expectations would be that he would follow in his father's trade, they were amazed at how the words of scripture gracefully flowed off his lips. He did not just "speak the words" he was reading, but it seemed that the words were somehow "within" him. They had also heard that he had been healing people and working miracles in other towns. In our children's story, Willie Bentley had an unusually strong gift of wonder and appreciation of nature and beauty. In his community, nobody else cared about what he was doing. People were busy working and farming, and it seemed like Willie was just wasting time. "Snow in Vermont is as common as dirt," people would say. Meanwhile, Willie persevered in his passion, maybe even knowing that somehow this would be his gift to the world.

We can tell a lot about towns and families by how they treat their own people. In our children's story and Gospel this week, we see two very contrasting responses to the "stand-outs" of their community. After reading the words of the scroll, Jesus tried to explain his own God-given call and purpose. He says, "I do not come on my own, nor do these works on my own. It is our heavenly Father who has sent me. I am not the first one sent as a prophet among you." He also refers to other prophets from Jewish history, Elijah and Elisha, who worked miracles outside their own communities. The people in Jesus' hometown reacted violently to his explanation. He was turning everything upside down and pushing them out of their comfort zone. This is God that he is talking about, and Jesus is just the son of a simple carpenter. If Jesus doesn't comply with tradition, they want him out of here. They cannot open their minds or hearts to the freedom and healing that is being offered to them through Jesus. Therefore, Jesus can work no miracles in his very own community.

Jesus and Snowflake Bentley were both isolated and mistreated by their own communities. But over time, people's eyes were opened to the great and lasting contributions they made. This is what it means to have prophetic gifts. Prophetic gifts tend to be not so much for the immediate era and community of that person, but have a greater purpose for the future and the whole world.

**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:** Who has lived where there is snow? Do you remember what it's like looking at individual snowflakes on windows? Did you find them magical? What things do you find magical that maybe no one else notices the way you do? Is it hard to share your excitement and wonder? Do you know people that "see" things that you don't really notice or get excited about? How do you treat them?

**THE CHILDREN'S STORY:** How was Snowflake Bentley treated? Did his family understand and help him?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** How about Jesus? How was he treated? Did his family and friends understand and support him?

**Our gifts are not just for our families or communities, but for the life and healing of the world. How can we encourage each other to celebrate and honor the unique calls of those we love, even when at the time, we don't fully understand how everything will work out in the end? How can we listen more carefully and openly to people who see new perspectives and have unique gifts? How can you encourage others to do so as well?**