

# Biblical Background

LUKE 1:1-4, 4:14-21

**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.

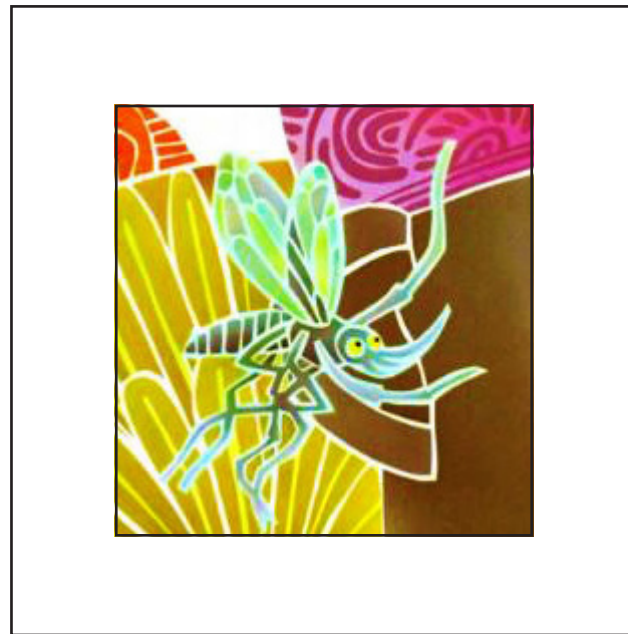
**Signs** John mentions that during the public ministry of Jesus he will perform seven specific signs. Each sign will reveal more fully that he is the Messiah. Some of the other signs include the healing of the paralytic in Chapter 5 and the raising of Lazarus in Chapter 11.

**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:** Who are some people that you recognize as being fully a in their gift? How do you think they got there? How does their gift enliven the whole community?

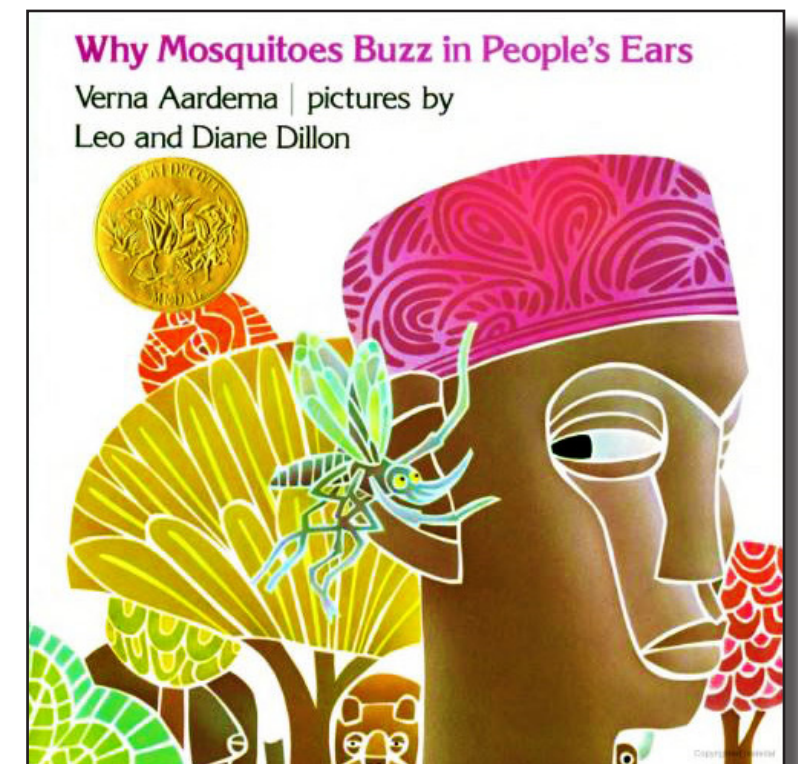
**CHARACTER QUALITIES:** RELIANCE UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT  
COURAGE

**ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Create picture frames with the church's communal prayer to the Holy Spirit on one side. On the other side list the gifts of the Spirit, fruits of the Spirit, and roles in the Body of Christ. Have each person decorate the frame on both sides with sequins and stars, encouraging them to be like Jesus and let their light and gifts shine. Hang frame from a piece of yarn so that it can be seen on both sides.

CYCLE C 3RD SUNDAY  
ORDINARY TIME

# Living Grace

"EMPOWERED IN THE SPIRIT TO DO OUR PART "



In *Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale*, Mosquito tells a story that causes a jungle disaster! The story is told as a "pourquoi tale" which explains how some natural phenomena came to be. (Pourquoi means "why" in French.) In this case it is answering the question of why mosquitoes buzz in people's ears. According to the African legend, the mosquito lies to a lizard, who puts sticks in his ears and ends up frightening another animal, which causes a panic down a long line of events. In the end, an owl is killed, and the owl is too sad to wake the sun until the animals hold court and find out who is responsible. The mosquito is eventually found out, but it hides in order to escape punishment. So now mosquitoes constantly buzz in people's ears to find out if everyone is still angry at them.

# Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION  
OF SACRED ART



**ORANS FIGURES WITH ARMS IN PRAISE**  
Panel from an early Christian Coptic monastery in Bawit, Egypt  
Relief sculpture in stone ~ 5th-6th Century ~ Louvre Museum ~ Paris, France

## EXPLORING THE ART:

This relief sculpture is from an excavated church wall in Bawit, Egypt. Bawit was an extremely important and highly influential Christian monastery site in Coptic Egypt from the 4th-9th centuries. Rediscovered by French archaeologist, Jean Clédat in 1901, the church was reconstructed inside the Louvre Museum using archaeological archives, photographs, and other archaeological findings. The panel above depicts Coptic Christians praying. The term "Coptic" describes both early and modern Egyptian Christians, as well as the distinctive art and architecture that developed as an early expression of the Christian faith. The Coptic Church is based on the teachings of St. Mark who brought Christianity to Egypt during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero in the 1st century just a few dozen years after Christ's ascension. Mark was one of the four evangelists and the one who wrote the oldest canonical gospel. The "orans" prayer position consists of lifting up both arms, hands wide open, palms facing away towards the God. This is the prayer position the Copts adopted from the beginning, and still follow today, as they stand for prayer in church or in private. In our Roman Catholic tradition, this position is used by the priest during the liturgy when he intercedes on behalf of all (i.e. during the Eucharistic Prayer and the Our Father).

The technique of "relief sculpture" involves cutting into a flat piece of stone and chiseling away the background. Reliefs on the walls of stone buildings were common in ancient Egypt and other Middle Eastern cultures.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN EGYPT

# Sunday Gospel

LUKE 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.

He said to them,  
"Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

Read-aloud video link:

**WHY MOSQUITOES BUZZ IN PEOPLE'S EARS**

Written by Verna Aardema & Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon

# Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

**WE ARE EACH CALLED AND GIVEN POWER BY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO PLAY OUR ROLE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

Our children's story teaches us about cause and effect in community life and the way in which we all live together. One lesson shows us what can happen when we choose not to listen to each other. Complete chaos ensues and someone can get hurt - really hurt. The story also shows us how deeply we are all connected. When one person hurts, we all hurt. Owl is grieving the loss of her owlet and is hurting too much to do her job. When any of us fail to perform the job that we are gifted and called to do there is a loss in the whole community - routines are disturbed, basic needs may not be met, and even life can be lost. This story also helps us to reflect on how nature is interwoven. Both the Old and New Testaments in the Bible teach us many lessons from nature, about the nature of God. It is similar to the way we can learn a lot about an artist by examining their work. The natural world is God's work of art and so are we.

In this gospel, Jesus for the first time before his own community and on his own, steps up and reveals his part in God's plan. Immediately his community's and family's eyes were opened. Luke tells us that they recognize in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah. "All spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth". The community and family in which Jesus grew up in Nazareth asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" They couldn't believe Jesus was the same young man they had watched play soccer in the street or work alongside his father in the carpenter shop. God sent Jesus to show us the way back to God. Jesus is the one who would bring good news to the poor, and to set people free of sin and the debilitating circumstances they find their lives in. Jesus will give sight to heal people physically and spiritually. He is the ONE to restore the blessing of God to his people and beyond. So much to grasp for all who are listening!

Why does Jesus seem different to them now, compared to when he left them as the "son of Joseph"? He has returned to them, the gospel tells us, "filled with the power of the Spirit". This scripture points out that we will one of the ways we know when someone is standing in the role God has chosen for them is by the consensus of the community. In our children's story, it was the consensus of the animal community that guided them and helped to resolve the loss of their community member. Life was restored through truth and justice, and the mosquito receives justice to this day as the story humorously tells us.

**We are also called by God to do our part, to fulfill our role. In this gospel we learn that we first must open our lives to the power of the Holy Spirit and then our role will emerge. In Jesus' and Owl's examples, we can see that when we take a risk and say, "YES!" life goes forth abundantly. As a community, we must support each other in finding and fulfilling our unique roles. This encourages each of us to do our part with grace and ease, and to build the Kingdom of God in our midst. What are some ways that you have seen the Holy Spirit working in your life or the lives of others as their role is being fulfilled?**

# Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

**YOUR STORY:** What is your role within your family? At school? With your friends? Which role is your favorite? What are the roles of the other people in your family, school, group of friends? What roles or jobs would you like to have that you do not have now?

**THE CHILDREN'S STORY:** Why is Owl's role in the community important? What happens each day when she doesn't play her role? How do the animals respond at first? What draws them together to help Owl? What is the result? What is the problem with Mosquito's actions? What is the lasting result?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** How does Jesus respond to what he is called to be and do? What helps him to have the courage to do the work that God had given him to do? How does the community respond? How did Jesus come to know for certain what his call was? When the gospel says that he returned to the community, where had he come from? Name the steps of the sacraments of initiation that Jesus went through and where they happened.

**How can we discover the role that God created us for? Where do we get the power to fulfill our role? What sacrament gives us the power to enliven our gifts with God's grace? How do our responses as individuals affect the life of the community?**