

To Fulfil

23 1 11

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence,
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power.

My text may be found in Matthew chapter 4 verses 14 - 16:

'so that what had been spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali

on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles -

the people who sat in darkness

have seen a great light,

and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death

light has dawned.'

The fourth in our series of five sermons on Epiphany, God made manifest, moves from John's account of Jesus beginning to draw his twelve disciples to himself to Matthew's account of the start of his public ministry.

In reading any text, we can make sense of what we read by asking certain basic questions of that text - for example: who ? when ? where ? why ? By doing so, we

are sorting the information into a way that can help us clarify what is going on. A good reader will do this automatically without thinking of the process but it can be useful actively to question a text to make sure we have fully understood what is being said. So if we apply this method to today's fairly long gospel, we can get our head round what exactly is being told to us.

Firstly, then, who? The 'who' in question is Jesus. There has been a pause after his baptism in the Jordan then temptation in the Wilderness before Jesus embarks on his full-time, public ministry.

The 'who' in question is also his disciples. Verses 18 – 22 are a summary of the call of Simon Peter and Andrew; of James and John, sons of Zebedee. They are fishermen. They are down by the lakeside. Simon and Andrew are fishing from the shore casting nets into the water; James and John are sitting in their father's boat mending their nets. All four are called from their work to follow Jesus - and they do. Their true vocation is, in the memorable words of the King James Bible, to be 'Fishers of Men' (v19).

Secondly, 'when' ? The timing is given not as we might do nowadays with day, month and year but by what of significance is happening in the world. And what has happened is the arrest of John. The removal of John from the public arena is

the time for Jesus to move into the public eye. John's work has been completed. John has announced the coming of the Messiah. It is now time for the Messiah himself to appear.

Thirdly, 'where' ? Born in Bethlehem, taken to Egypt by his parents, Jesus has spent his boyhood in Nazareth working in his father's carpenter's workshop. Now, it is time to leave his home village for a new base for his ministry in Capernaum. Dating from the 1st century BC, Capernaum was located on the North West shore of the Sea of Galilee and it was important enough to boast a custom house and a detachment of soldiers. It provided a suitable centre from which to move through a region ripe to hear the word of God. According to Matthew, Jesus is echoing the words of his cousin, John the Baptist, with his call to 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

And fourthly, 'why' ? There are two reasons why which essentially amount to the same thing. The first 'why' is to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. Matthew in his gospel is particularly keen to show to his Jewish-Christian readers and hearers that Jesus was fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah which are found in the Old Testament. You may remember the extraordinary Bible Study Jesus gave Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus – 'Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to

them the things about himself in all the scriptures.’ (Luke 24 v27) There are several quotations in Matthew’s account of the nativity but here my text ‘so that what had been spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

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indicates that his ministry fulfils what Isaiah foresaw.

The second ‘why’ comes at the end of our gospel passage: ‘to teach’ and ‘to cure disease and every sickness’. God is made manifest in the teaching and miracles of Christ. By teaching with authority, Jesus was making the word of God real to his hearers. By miracles of healing – curing the blind, deaf, dumb and lame – Jesus was demonstrating the power of God to his onlookers.

So our gospel today has presented us with another aspect of Epiphany, God made manifest. Just after John the Baptist has been thrown into prison, Jesus begins his public ministry in and around Capernaum with his disciples. He does so to fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament by what he teaches and through his miracles

of healing.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

23^d January, 2011

H: Sermon 23: Fulfil

