

How does the coming of Christ become good news to the oppressed? In our world today there are many who are oppressed. In our own nation the caste system has created such oppressive divides that the dalits of our nation still find it difficult to live with dignity. Women and children are equally oppressed in trafficking and child labour. What did Jesus do when he was on earth that affected the poor and the oppressed? Only when we look into the gospels do we find what all Jesus did that changed the lives of many and how he continues to do so. In the gospel reading for this morning we notice that John who was in prison wanted to make sure that Jesus was indeed the Messiah who was to come. What were the deeds that he did that made John ask that question and what was John's role in all this?

John was sent as the forerunner to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. He was a prophet who came after 400 silent years and then challenged the people to repent of their evil ways. John was also aware that the Messiah was to come and that he would be the one who will set the captives free and proclaim release for the oppressed. John must have surely seen hear the witness of the Father and the Holy Spirit at the Baptism of Jesus. The voice said: 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.' John also saw the Holy Spirit of God descend on him like a dove. So John was given evidence that this is the Messiah. However, there were many in things in the OT that were written about the Messiah which John would have understood from his reading of it.

The birth of Jesus is foretold by the prophet Isaiah, 'therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7: 14) Matthew confirms this as a fulfilment of prophesy by saying, 'Now this was all done that it might be fulfilled "the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" which means God with us.' The coming of Jesus in human form fulfilled the promise of 'God with us'. In a similar manner Isaiah had promised about the ministry of Jesus as: 'The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn' (Isa 61:1-2 NIV). When Jesus began his ministry this was the passage that he read in the synagogue and at the end of the reading he said, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:21 NIV).

When Jesus was on earth that is exactly what he did. He went around healing people who were physically oppressed by sickness; he delivered those who were oppressed by demonic forces and set them free. He cared for the poor and the outcastes of society like the tax collectors and the prostitutes whom society had ostracized. Jesus enabled people to see that they were made in the image of God and gave them a new hope. He released the ordinary people from the bondage of traditions which the teachers of the law had imposed upon them. All this was the role of the Messiah and Jesus fulfilled it.

Jesus continues to be good news for the poor and the oppressed. But how is this good news to reach those who are poor and oppressed in our society? Jesus can only do that through his instrument, the church, the people of God. We too are called to behave like Jesus and stand in solidarity with those who are being oppressed. Over two hundred Muslim families have been either bulldozed into reconversion either through threat or through false promises. How do we as a community of faith stand with them

when they are oppressed? Are we good news to the oppressed? Tomorrow it will be the turn of the Christian Community to face a similar ordeal. May the coming of Christ truly bring peace in our nation and deliver us from such oppression.