

1 - CHOSEN AND ANOINTED



Dura Synagogue, David anointed by Samuel, 3rd Century

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him...
(Isaiah 11:1,2a)*

Background info

In the Old Testament, anointing with oil was a sign of being called and chosen by God for a particular role, such as priest, prophet, or king. In Exodus we read of Aaron and his sons anointed as priests, and even objects in the Tabernacle being sprinkled with fragrant oil as part of their dedication, set apart and blessed for divine use, with God's instruction to Moses that 'this is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come.' (Exodus 30:22-32)



a) Anointed by oil and Spirit

(Read 1 Samuel 16:6-13, Isaiah 11:1-3, Luke 4:14-21)

God tells Samuel that Saul has failed as a king and will be replaced. Samuel is to fill his anointing horn with oil and find Jesse of Bethlehem, as one of his sons is to be king. Unfortunately, Jesse had eight sons and Samuel assumes the first one he meets must be 'the one'.

He is not, and God makes it plain that none of the first seven are his choice. So it is that the youngest son, David, is sent for; 'Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one."'

Samuel anoints David with oil, and 'the Spirit of the Lord' confirms David as a future king.

In New Testament times the old Davidic dynasty was still in existence but had been without royal power for almost six hundred years, hence Isaiah's historic reference to a stump. But there was still life in it, not least because of a promise that 'Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever' (2 Samuel 7:16).

Isaiah's description of 'a shoot' is seen as pointing towards a king filled with the Spirit of God. Out of a period of darkness will come light (Isaiah 9:2).

Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan River: 'And the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"' (Luke 3:22-23).

Back in his hometown of Nazareth and reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue, Jesus identifies himself as the subject of Isaiah's prophetic words (Isaiah 61:1-2), though not without sad consequences, as old neighbours and others join together to throw him out of town.



Discussion...

Q) Anointing with oil is an ancient tradition, for objects or people (e.g., the coronation of a monarch). It can also form a part of our prayer for the sick or dying. How do you view this tradition?

Q) How vital to Jesus was his connection to the prophesies of old?

Q) Jesus' old neighbours threw him out of the place where he had grown up and learned a trade. Have you ever been surprised by the claims of someone well known to you, and how did you react?



b) Anointing as a sign

(Read 1 Chronicles 29:21-25, 1 Kings 19:13b-16, Acts 10:36-43)

David promised that his son Solomon would replace him on the throne, and with David approaching the end of his life the time has come. In God's presence, the anointing of Solomon as King takes place. The description of this event, though brief, is echoed in the coronation of monarchs throughout history.

Elijah famously hides from danger in a cave. Help comes via God's word, leading him to a mountain where he experiences a strong wind, an earthquake, and a gentle whisper, within which he hears God's instruction to return to Damascus (where his spiritual life had veered off course) and complete his work in both the political and spiritual realm. That includes anointing

Hazael and Jehu as kings and Elisha to succeed him as prophet.

The passage from Acts is Peter's speech in the house of Cornelius the centurion. Because he is addressing a Gentile audience, Peter goes into more depth in his witness about the ministry of Jesus, who he calls Lord of all. He begins with John the Baptist, moves on to Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit, and refers to the many acts of divine power witnessed by so many. He talks of the prophets' words being fulfilled in Jesus, who has been anointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.

Discussion...

Q) Anointing was seen as a sign of being chosen by God for a specific role of leadership or responsibility. Today, very few leadership in the world include anointing, but responsibilities to those over whom they exercise authority can be great. How does that play out in your own town, county or country?

Q) The meeting between Cornelius and Peter was very much prearranged, as both had heard God's call, and all who were there and responded to Peter's word were filled with the Spirit and baptized. Could this be seen as an anointing, to become sharers of God's love and grace?

Q) There are many roles within our churches, both in the foreground and background of mission and ministry. How important is it to listen, like Elijah, for the gentle whisper and call of God?

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c) Expectations

(Read Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 61:1-3, Isaiah 42:1-4)

By going astray from God's way, Israel as a nation has drifted from light into darkness and is now in danger of falling prey to other nations. But God is not about to abandon them, and despite the direction they have travelled he will bring them home triumphant once more into the light.

And how will he do this? Though the birth of a child who will sit on David's throne. 'Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14). This is child like no other, for no Israelite or Judean king had been called a 'Mighty God' as in Isaiah's prophesy. More likely is the promised Messiah.



Baptism of Christ, Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci c1475

The identity of the Anointed One of Isaiah 61 has been a point of contention with scholars, but the work of this 'proclaimer of good news' seems far more wide-ranging than any human prophet and is seen as pointing ultimately to the Messiah. The same can be said of the 'servant' in Isaiah 42, described as 'chosen', anointed with the Spirit, and with a mission to bring justice and be a light to the nations, achieved without oppression ('a bruised reed he will not break'). This passage could be seen in context as an idealised Israel or a messianic figure, and the opening words, 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold' are echoed at the time of Jesus' baptism, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'

There are many expectations within the OT passages used at Advent. The Messiah will be judge, prophet, priest, king, servant, peacemaker, and known as Mighty God.

Discussion...

Q) What are your own expectations through the season of Advent?

Q) We rely heavily on the prophets of old for the bigger picture of Jesus. Is there still a role for the prophetic voice, and where might we hear that?

Q) A 'child' is very much at the heart of Isaiah's message. What might be the significance of picturing a child rather than the adult that Jesus was when his ministry began?



Let's pray...

For ourselves, that through this season of Advent our faith and fellowship together might be strengthened.

Quotes

'The message of Advent doesn't fit neatly into a sound-bite or vignette. It's too complex, too deep, to compete with glitter and noise; and it's a hard sell in a culture that would rather skip straight to the big finish. But Advent is too important to be forgotten, because it is this season that prepares us to encounter our Lord.'

— Kerry van der Vinne, *Advent: Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room*

*'Into this world, this demented inn
in which there is absolutely no room for him at all,
Christ comes uninvited.'*

— Thomas Merton