

THE PREACHING AND PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

September 1, 2013

The Beginning of the Indiction

Revision C

GOSPEL: Luke 4:16-22

EPISTLE: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

The beginning of the ecclesiastical New Year has its roots in the Old Testament Feast of Trumpets, which occurred at about this time of year. To understand the significance of the Gospel and Epistle lessons, therefore, a good understanding of the Feast of Trumpets and its prophetic significance is necessary.

In the West, today's Gospel lesson is sometimes used for January 1st or New Year's Day; other times, it is used for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany. Today's Epistle lesson is generally used in the West for the American holiday of Thanksgiving Day in November.

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Background: The Feast of Trumpets

The Lord in the Mosaic Law proclaimed seven Feasts as follows:

FEAST	MONTH	FEAST DAY
Day of Lord's Passover	First	14 Nisan
Feast of Unleavened Bread	First	15-21 Nisan
Day of Firstfruits	First	16 Nisan
Feast of Weeks or Pentecost	Third	6 Sivan
Feast of Trumpets	Seventh	1 Tishri
Day of Atonement	Seventh	10 Tishri
Feast of Tabernacles	Seventh	15-22 Tishri

The first month, Nisan, was proclaimed to be the first month of the year (Exodus 12:2), but the 1st of Tishri came to be referred to as Jewish New Year's Day. This is still the case today. In the Orthodox Church, a similar situation exists. Pascha (or Passover or Easter) is the beginning of the Orthodox lectionary and the chief of the feast days. But yet September 1st is the Beginning of the Indiction or proclamation¹.

Features of the Day of Trumpets

Between the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Trumpets is a long summer (almost four months) that can be quite hot, especially in the Southern lowlands. In areas near the Negev today, work is often suspended for several hours during the heat of the day. While this may not have been the case in Biblical times, "bearing the burden and scorching heat of the day" (Matthew 20:12) was difficult and the relief of cooler weather was welcomed.

According to rabbinical traditions², the Feast of Trumpets was the anniversary of the beginning of the world. In addition, since the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur) was regarded as a day of judgment, the Feast of Trumpets inaugurated a period of repentance in preparation for Yom Kippur.

The distinctive feature about the Feast of Trumpets was simply a day of the blowing of trumpets where only the priests were allowed to blow the silver trumpets (Numbers 10:8). Nothing is mentioned in the Mosaic Law regarding how to do it, but the day was declared a Sabbath (no matter what day of the week it fell on). Thus it was regarded as an important day.

Since it was the first day of the month, the normal sacrifice for the beginning of the month (or new moon) was required (Numbers 28:11-15). Under Mosaic Law, the beginning of any month was determined by the first sighting of the new moon. In addition to these sacrifices, others were required also (Numbers 29:1-6). While this was a Mosaic Law requirement, there were no instructions to answer the question: "Why are we doing this?" However, this can be inferred by comparing the uses of trumpets in the Scripture.

Various Uses of Trumpets in the Old Testament

There were many different uses of trumpets described in the Scriptures. Among them are the ones listed below:

- **Calling the Assembly³ Together:** One blast was used for the heads of clans; two blasts was used for the entire assembly of the congregation (Numbers 10:1-4, 7).
- **Commencing a Journey:** At the sound of the first alarm, the camps on the East side of the Tabernacle moved out. At the second alarm, those on the South side moved out (Numbers 10:5-6), etc.

¹ For more details on the Seven Hebrew Feast Days, see Mark Kern, The Hebrew Feast Days, St. Athanasius Press, 1975.

² Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p.350

³ Assembly is the Hebrew word *edah*; in the Greek Septuagint, *edah* is translated as *ekklesia*. In the New Testament, *ekklesia* is translated Church.

- **Going into Battle:** Moses was instructed that when going into battle “you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the Lord your God and be saved from your enemies” (Number 10:9).
- **Warning of an Imminent Battle:** Watchmen were required to blow a trumpet to warn of an approaching enemy (Ezekiel 33:3-6).
- **Proclaiming a New King:** For example: Zadok the priest anointing Solomon (1 Kings 1:39), Elisha anointing Jehu (2 Kings 9:1-13), and Jehoiada anointing Joash (2 Chronicles 23:11-13).
- **Leading the Procession of the Ark:** As the Ark of the Covenant was moved, trumpets preceded it (1 Chronicles 15:24, 16:6).
- **With Other Instruments:** Along with horn, cymbals, harps, lyres and voices at various events centered on the Ark and the Temple (1 Chronicles 15:24, 16:42; 2 Chronicles 15:14; Ezra 3:10-13; Nehemiah 12:31-43.)

There are few descriptions of how the people of God actually celebrated the Feast of Trumpets in the Old Testament. One of the few references that give us some insight, however, occurred in the days of Nehemiah shortly after the completion of the wall of Jerusalem. On the first day of the seventh month (Tishri), Ezra began reading the books of the Mosaic Law to the people. The people all wept because they realized that they hadn't kept the Law and the Babylonian captivity was the result. However, Nehemiah instructed them that this day (the Feast of Trumpets) is holy to the Lord, and weeping and mourning are not appropriate. “Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to the Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:9-12).

Prophetic References to Trumpets in the New Testament

There are many references to the end of time where trumpets are involved. Among them are:

- **Angels Will Blow the Trumpets:** When the Son of man comes on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory, He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather His elect from one end of the sky to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).
- **Seven Distinct Trumpet Blasts:** Seven angels will sound seven trumpets. The first six trumpet blasts consist of all kinds of wars and plagues (Revelation 8, 9).
- **The Last Trumpet:** At the seventh or last trumpet, the Kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord, who will rule it forever. At this time, the dead will be raised to face judgment (Revelation 10:5-7, 11:15-19, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54.)
- **Meet Lord in the Air:** At the last trumpet the dead in Christ shall rise first, then the living will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air as He comes (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

From the above references, one can see that on the Feast of Trumpets, an assembly is called together. This assembly is the Church who are gathered together to be with their Lord on His return. Collectively they represent various camps of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16, 3:6-9, 3:29) and they are commencing a journey. The trumpets are blown both to warn of an impending battle (giving people a chance to repent) and to lead the Armies of God into battle (Revelation 19). The last trumpet also proclaims a new King to rule over the Kingdom of this world. The trumpets also precede the Ark of His Covenant which will appear in the Temple in

heaven (Revelation 11:19) and which is about to move to the earth for its permanent resting place in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-3).

Thus the Feast of Trumpets is a time of rejoicing. There has been a long, hot summer (2,000 years so far), and the Church is very eager for her Lord to return (Revelation 6:9-11, 3:11; 1 Corinthians 16:22). The Feast of Trumpets thus does begin a “new year” in that it begins the end of time.

In choosing this occasion for the beginning of the Church Year, the Church Fathers have directed our attention to the Lord’s return in Glory. Today is referred to as “The Beginning of the Indiction” (i.e. the proclamation) which is exactly what trumpets were used for.

THE PREACHING OF THE CHURCH

September 1, 2012

Gospel: Luke 4:16-22

Background

Today's Gospel lesson took place in Nazareth, Jesus' hometown (Luke 4:16), in the year 27 AD, or early in His public ministry where He was asked to read from the Prophet Isaiah in the Synagogue. He had recently been baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34) and tempted for 40 days in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13).

Luke's Gospel omits some of the events recorded in John's Gospel. For example, after His baptism, John records Jesus' trip to Cana of Galilee for the wedding feast (John 2:1-12), then to Capernaum before returning to Jerusalem for Passover of 27 AD (John 2:12-13). While there, Jesus cleaned out the Temple (John 2:13-25), spoke with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and, with His disciples began baptizing many people in Judea (John 3:22-36) such that word got out that Jesus had baptized more people than John (John 4:1).

At this point He left Judea to go to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (John 4:3, Luke 4:14). On the way, He spoke with Photini, the woman at the well in Sychar (John 4:4-45). Following this, He came to Nazareth where our Gospel lesson picks up.

The next identifiable date in the Scriptures is Pentecost of the following year, 28 AD, (John 5:1) where John Chrysostom and other Church Fathers identify the feast mentioned in John 5:1 as Pentecost due to the references to the Mosaic Law. Pentecost, in Jewish tradition, commemorated⁴ the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. See footnote to John 5:1 in the Orthodox Study Bible).

Thus, Jesus' reading from Isaiah in the Synagogue (Luke 4:18-19) could refer to the Feast of Trumpets, but we do not have firm dates to confirm this. Since the Year of Jubilee was announced by the blowing of trumpets 10 days after the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 25:8-13) and since the context of Jesus' reading speaks of liberty for the captives and the oppressed (which was what Jubilee was all about), the date of the Gospel lesson was probably around the Feast of Trumpets.

Whether the Year of Jubilee was actually observed according to Mosaic Law, we don't know. Jewish tradition suggests it was. Josephus, the Jewish historian, records⁵ the gist of the regulations for the Year of Jubilee, but doesn't mention any instance when it was actually followed.

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⁴ The nation of Israel arrived at Mt. Sinai on the first day of the third month, Sivan (Exodus 19:1). A few days later, after Israel had been prepared, the Lord gave the Law from the midst of the fire on the top of the mountain. Thus Pentecost commemorated the Old Covenant Law. Under the Hebrew calendar, Pentecost could fall on the 5th, 6th or 7th of Sivan depending on whether the first two months (Nisan and Iyyar) had 29 or 30 days.

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities* iii, xii, 3.

At the time of the Gospel lesson, Jesus was very highly regarded. He “was being glorified by all” (Luke 4:15), “all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). They just couldn’t believe this was Joseph and Mary’s son, the kid they grew up with.

Jesus Was Anointed in His Humanity

The first part of the Reading from Isaiah that Jesus read stated, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me” (Luke 4:18) to do several things. Christ did not need anointing in His Deity; but this was appropriate for His humanity.

Ambrose of Milan stated⁶ that not only was Christ anointed in His humanity, but just as the Spirit sent Christ by His anointing, so later Christ sent the Spirit. The Trinity works together in their dealing with mankind.

“The clear evidence of the Scriptures is that the Holy Spirit appointed the Apostles and Prophets. We add that the Spirit was upon Christ. As Christ sent the Spirit (John 14:26), so the Spirit sent the Son of God. For the Son of God says: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me; He has sent Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind’. And having read this from the Book of Isaiah, He said ‘Today has this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears’ (Luke 4:18-21); that He might point out that it was said of Himself”.

“Can we, then, wonder if the Spirit sent both the Prophets and the Apostles, since Christ said, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me?’ (Luke 4:18) And rightly did He say ‘upon Me’, because He was speaking as the Son of Man. For as the Son of Man He was anointed and sent to preach the Gospel”.

Hippolytus wrote⁷ about Christ’s anointing as being part of the message of the Prophets. Those who believed this were cleansed; those who didn’t had their sins sealed for Judgment Day.

“Gabriel said, ‘And to anoint the Most Holy’ (Daniel 9:24). The Most Holy is none other than the Son of God, who, when He came and manifested Himself, said to them, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me’ (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1), and so forth. Whoever, therefore, believed on the heavenly Priest, were cleansed by that same Priest, and their sins were blotted out. And whoever did not believe on Him, despising Him as a man, had their sins sealed, as those, which could not be taken away. The angel, foreseeing that not all should believe on Him, said, ‘To finish sins, and to seal up sins’ (Daniel 9:24 LXX). For as many as continued to disbelieve Him, even to the end, had their sins not finished, but sealed to be kept for judgment. But as many as will believe on Him as One able to remit sins, have their sins blotted out. Therefore he says: ‘To seal up vision and prophet’” (Daniel 9:24).

⁶ Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, III, i, 1-2

⁷ Hippolytus, Commentary on Daniel, II, 17, in Part I Exegetical

Jesus' Reading in the Synagogue

When Jesus was asked to read from the Prophet Isaiah (which was the prescribed reading for the day according to the Synagogue lectionary) He read from Isaiah 61:1-2. There are six items included in this and most of them relate to the Feast of Trumpets and thus the beginning of the Church Year. What made this reading all the more powerful is that Jesus stated after He read it: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). The six items are:

I am the Messiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me." Messiah means "Anointed One." For Jesus to say that this Scripture was fulfilled in their ears meant that He claimed to be Messiah. The villagers found this hard to believe (Luke 4:22ff).

Preaching the Good News (Gospel) to the Poor: As with the rich young (synagogue) ruler that Jesus asked to sell all that he had to obtain treasure in heaven, the rich generally have difficulty receiving the Good News. The burden of their wealth makes it difficult for them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The poor, however, receive it much easier. The Indiction is the proclamation of the Good News to the poor. So it was with the preaching of the Twelve and the Seventy: largely to the poor.

Send Out the Downtrodden Forgiven: Luke's Gospel quotes the Septuagint text of Isaiah 61 word for word except for this phrase. The Septuagint reading of this phrase is "heal the brokenhearted." The word "send out" in Luke's Gospel is the Greek word *apostollo* from which comes the word apostle. The Twelve and the Seventy Apostles and others like them throughout the centuries have been sent out forgiven. This is part of the Indiction.

Cyril of Alexandria stated⁸ that the words "heal the brokenhearted" referred to those "whom Satan had broken by the rod of spiritual violence".

Proclaim Release to the Captives: This refers to those saints of all ages held captive in Hades awaiting the coming of Messiah. When Christ rose from the dead, He led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8, Psalms 68:18) and plundered Hades. Celebration of this event is a part of the Pascha sunrise service in the Orthodox Church and more discussion of this is included under Holy Saturday.

Proclaim Recovery of Sight to the Blind: Many people are unable to see what is going on around them. This was true of the villagers in Nazareth who tried to throw Jesus off a cliff shortly after He read these passages (Luke 4:28-30). This was also true of the Pharisees who had such difficulty with Jesus' healing of a blind man on the Sabbath (John 9:1-34). Jesus spoke to them afterward: "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind" (John 9:39). The problem here is the blindness caused by sin (John 9:41).

Proclaim an Acceptable Year of the Lord: In the Mosaic Law, every seventh year "the Land shall have a Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your

⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, tr. R. Payne Smith, Studion Publishers, Inc., 1983, Chapter 4

vineyard” (Leviticus 25:4). After seven Sabbaths of years, or seven times seven, the fiftieth year was the Year of Jubilee. If the seventh year was a Sabbath to the Lord, the fiftieth was more so.

John of Damascus stated⁹ that Christ’s Reading from Isaiah applied to those held captive in Hades awaiting His coming just as much as it applied to those living in Israel.

Christ’s soul, when it was deified, descended into Hades, in order that, just as the Sun of Righteousness rose for those upon the earth, so likewise He might bring light to those who sit under the earth in darkness and shadow of death. He brought the message of peace to those upon the earth, release to the prisoners, sight to the blind. He became to those who believed the Author of everlasting salvation and to those who did not believe a reproach of their unbelief; He became the same to those in Hades. The result was that every knee should bow to Him, of things in heaven, and things in earth and things under the earth. After He had freed those who had been bound for ages, immediately He rose again from the dead, showing us the way of resurrection.

Beginning each year in the Church calendar, we ask that this be an acceptable year of the Lord. As Paul said, after quoting a Messianic passage from Isaiah, “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2, Isaiah 49:8).

In the coming year, the Church lectionary will proclaim the Messiah and will preach the good news (Gospel) to the poor. Those broken by Satan will be healed and the bishops will be sent out to do the Lord’s work. The Church will remember the Lord’s victory over sin, death and Hades in leading captivity captive and those whose sin is forgiven will have the eyes of their heart opened. This is the preaching of the Church.

The Reaction of the People of Nazareth

After Jesus had finished the Reading and His commentary, the people of Nazareth got so angry with Him that they hauled Him outside the city and tried to throw Him off a cliff. However, Jesus “passed through their midst and went His way” (Luke 4:30). How Jesus did this is not obvious, but He did it on two other occasions also (John 8:59, 10:39).

Tertullian spoke¹⁰ of Christ being called a Nazarene, according to prophecy, although the proper term was Nazirite¹¹, which Tertullian uses interchangeably.

Christ had to be called a ‘Nazarene’ according to prophecy; therefore the Jews also designate us¹², on that very account, ‘Nazerenes’ after Him. For we are they of whom it is written, ‘Her Nazirites were whiter than snow’ (Lamentations 4:7); even they who were once defiled with the stains of sin, and darkened with the clouds of ignorance. But to Christ the title ‘Nazarene’ was destined to

⁹ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 29.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 4,8.

¹¹ Tertullian links the words “Nazarene” and “Nazirite”, also spelled “Nazarite”. Nazareth, as a town, does not appear in the Old Testament, perhaps due to its insignificance, nor does the term “Nazarene”. The term “Nazirite” predates Moses, and refers to a person dedicated to God for a certain period of time with specified duties and regulations (Numbers 6).

¹² The word for “Christian” in Hebrew today is “Notsri”, meaning “Nazarene”.

become a suitable one, from the hiding-place of His infancy, for which He went down and dwelt at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), to escape from Archelaus, the son of Herod (Matthew 2:22).

But Christ will be (the Christ) of the prophets, wherever He is found in accordance with the prophets. And yet even at Nazareth, He didn't preach anything new, but was rejected (Luke 4:29) by reason of a simple proverb (Luke 4:23). When I observe that they laid their hands on Him, I cannot help drawing a conclusion respecting His bodily substance. It cannot have been a phantom, since it was capable of being touched and even violently handled, when He was seized, taken and led to the brink of a precipice. Although He escaped through their midst, He had already experienced their rough treatment, and afterwards went His way, no doubt because the crowd gave way, or was even broken through. If Christ was in disguise, as Marcion claimed, He would not have submitted to any touch.