Acts 8:35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

It has been customary during this season of Easter to read the historic book of Acts simply because those who put together the pericopes we are reading felt that this season is an excellent season to contemplate and see how the Christian message was being spread about. Yes, how the name of Jesus was being proclaimed to the world. One of the classic histories found in that regard is indeed the history before us: the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Some consider this the first “Gentile” conversion to the Christian faith. No doubt, it is an important and information filled event.

Note I said it was important and information filled. That’s because as you study this text there is so much revealed about the faith, how we get it and what it is about, and yet I am going to guess that most of us would miss these important things. Miss it because we are all wrapped up in the big picture of the history rather than in the details of this history. So, let’s you and I get into the details of this history and learn some important things in regard to our faith. Our theme will be: **THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS.**

Please note that this history actually begins because after the stoning of the first martyr Stephen and the breakout of tremendous persecution with the result that the Church at Jerusalem is scattered. It is Philip, the apostle of the Lord, who decides to go to the area of Samaria and continue to preach Christ. There is no doubt that Philip is meeting with tremendous success. So successful is this preaching that the Apostles even send Peter and John to Samaria to give help to Philip in the work. Eventually Peter and John will return to Jerusalem, the point of that being that Churches had been established and Pastoral leadership was appointed. In other words the work of bringing people to Christ was thoroughly put together and now other parts of the world could be brought to faith.

It is at this point that Philip is directed by an angel of the Lord to go and hang out on the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. Mind you, to get there Philip has to travel some 30 miles or better just to get south of Jerusalem. So Philip is directed quite a ways away from where he has been preaching. Notice he just goes. Now, I can tell you that many a pastor would like to have the ease of what happened here. It would be so much easier to know what to do when you get a call to another congregation if God would just send an angel and give you direct commands. “Yes, Pastor, you are to go…or No, Pastor, you are not to go!” God does not work that way today but if he did, I can tell you that I don’t know a single pastor who would not do exactly what God’s Angel said. So it is with Philip. He is told to go and that’s what he does.

The next thing we hear is that Philip meets this Ethiopian Eunuch. He meets him as he is starting out, no doubt starting out on the road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. This Ethiopian is a believer in the One True God. He is a convert to Judaism and he has been to Jerusalem to worship God. This man is reading his Bible. He is actually reading the book of the Prophet Isaiah. What I like is that the man is reading out loud. There are a few things to note here. First, this man’s faith is based on the Word of God. Please remember that at this time the New Testament has not been written, well, maybe some of it is in the works and yet this man is a believer in the Lord God. It is God’s Word that brought him to faith. How he first heard God’s Word, we don’t know, but I will tell you that just as today, it is the Word of God through which the Holy Spirit will work faith in hearts. It is how you got faith and how this man got faith. Do you get the feeling that the Word of God is important?

The next thing I want you to notice is that this man is reading out loud. He is not afraid of showing his faith, not afraid of being laughed at or even of being a wide-open believer. He is traveling and reading out loud, I would surmise he is doing this that others might hear. Please note that this is at a time when being a believer could bring you trouble from the Roman gov’t. Even with that, this man is not afraid and is indeed, reading out loud.

Now I want you to note that he is reading Isaiah. Makes you wonder what he heard, saw, and experienced on this worship trip. We are probably within a year or two of the resurrection of Jesus. Persecution of Christians is widespread, especially in Jerusalem. Do you get the feeling this man had heard a thing or two about this Jesus and the events surrounding Jesus? Do you get the feeling that he is reading Isaiah because Isaiah is one of the most prominent books of prophecy concerning the Christ of God? And do you get the feeling that this man has got questions, questions that I think he has asked but he grasps that the answers he got just didn’t seem right? Answers from the purely Jewish rabbis and religious leaders who don’t want to admit anything when it comes to Jesus.

So this man is reading out loud. Philip has been sent to hear him by the Lord and now here comes that interesting and wonderful question of Philip, **“Do you understand what you are reading?”** Philip grasps the situation. Philip sees the opportunity and Philip wants to help this man grasp the truth. The man’s reply? **“How can I, unless someone explains it to me?”**

Now for all you people in this world who proclaim that you don’t need anyone to help you grasp the Bible, that you can read it and get its truth all by yourself…just what does this say to and about that attitude of yours? It is true, I believe the Bible clear and precise, straightforward and the means by which the Holy Spirit is going to work in your heart to bring about faith. And yet note that the Ethiopian doesn’t declare he can get it himself or even that the Holy Spirit will lead him to the truth. This man grasps that God works through prophets and that God works through those appointed to teach and preach. This man grasps that the Holy Spirit is going to work in him and help him by giving him someone, a believer filled with the Holy Spirit, a witness to what went on, a person of strong faith and true knowledge who will help him understand what God’s Word is saying! So the next time you think you don’t need a pastor or teacher to grasp the wonder of God, then you just think of this man and how God sent Philip to bring him to faith in Jesus! Isn’t that the reason God has given us the Church with its pastors and teachers? Isn’t that the reason that God has given us his Holy and True Word? All of these things combined can and do lead us to true and wonderful faith in Jesus.

And then the greatest and most wonderful part. **“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”** Beginning with that very passage of Scripture! Remember this is the Old Testament. Remember Jesus said to his disciples, **“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”** The Bible is about Jesus from beginning to end. It is the history of how God promised, fulfilled and provided our Savior from sin. And that is the good news.

Again, I get disheartened when I hear people teaching or preaching things that are not this good news of Jesus. So many teach “in the name of Jesus” how you are to live, what you are to do, how you live to show your love to God. But all too often, while they are preaching how to live, they continually forget to tell you why. You do this because of what Jesus has done. You do this because Jesus has died for your sins and rose from the dead to proclaim this forgiveness truly and surely yours. We strive to believe and obey the Lord Jesus, not because we have to but rather because we want to out of love and gratitude in our hearts for this precious and eternal gift of heaven. We don’t do these things to prove our faith, to show how much we love God or for any other reason than that God has so loved us. But if you leave Jesus out, if you fail to teach about sin, repentance and redemption then what is your motive for life? If all Jesus does is teach us how to live better, how to love better, how to be better humans…why is that good news? Because every religion of the world claims this what they are teaching.

No, the good news is about how God sent his Son Jesus to be our Savior from sin. Philip spends his time showing the Ethiopian the wonder and marvel of Jesus. And clearly the Holy Spirit grants this man the faith to believe and trust in the work of Jesus. Do you know how I know that? Because of what happens next.

What happens next is that the Ethiopian says, **“Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”** Now if baptism is only about our showing our love for Jesus, then why the urgency here? The other thing to note is this, Philip is teaching elementary things about Jesus and clearly included in his teaching, his elementary teaching about Jesus is the sacrament of baptism. And Philip teaches so clearly about baptism that the Ethiopian grasps this gift of God, this gift of faith from the Holy Spirit is what he needs. And with that, this man is baptized. This man received the blessings and benefits of baptism because as the text tells us, **“He went on his way rejoicing.”** He knew that with that baptism, God had declared him his child and an heir of eternal life.

The other thing I find so very interesting is what the Holy Spirit does. There would be those who would say, “The Holy Spirit came and this man could speak in tongues and do miracles and he was now on fire for the Lord.” I believe this man got the Holy Spirit…that’s what caused his great joy as he went on his way. Yet note that the text says the Holy Spirit acted on Philip.

Philip, by the power of the Holy Spirit was **“suddenly taken away.”** This is the only time this verb is used in the New Testament. You could translate it “raptured.” What it means is that Philip was instantly transported from one place to another. Philip was taken away from the Ethiopian and Philip appeared at Azotus. By my calculations Azotus is some 15 miles from the site where the baptism took place. It all depends on where on the road they found the water.

Just as a challenge, for those of you who like to claim you are the ones who really have the Holy Spirit because you can speak in tongues or perform miracles, things easily faked, well how about you show me the Holy Spirit because you show up in Mayville and then disappear to Vassar…instantly! If you’ve got the gifts and faith you proclaim shouldn’t be any problem. But I won’t hold my breath.

God saw to it that this man, a believer in Judaism, now has come to realize that his faith is to be in Jesus the fulfiller and whole point of Judaism. Jesus came to be the Savior of the world. Came to show us the grace, love and compassion of God upon souls that are by nature lost and condemned. Jesus is what our preaching and teaching needs to be about. About his victory. About our joy in His redemption for us. About our being given the gift of faith and eternal life in Jesus.

By the way, did you notice that wonderful line in our Epistle reading for today? 1 John 3:23-24. It is a passage that basically sums up what happened in the book of Acts. It says, **“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.”**

May you, like the Ethiopian, believe in Jesus and go away rejoicing! Amen.