

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY,
JANUARY 25, 2004
Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; Ps 19:8, 9, 15; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21**

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The main theme of today's readings is the Word of God, which is sure and unfailing, and a cause for joy. Ezra the priest-scribe and Nehemiah the governor were Jewish leaders who reformed the people of Judah several decades after the Babylonian Exile (587-538 B.C.E.) was over and there was great laxity and disorder among the people. The reform was brought to a close by a reading of the Torah ("the Book of the Law of God") with explanation, so that all could understand. Some consider this the birth of Judaism, the particular shape that the Israelite religion took after the Babylonian Exile. It took place during the Jewish New Year, in the seventh month (Tishri, our September-October), when the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and the greatest feast, that of Booths, or Succoth, also took place. It was a very special day for God's people; there was to be no dieting on that day!

The gospel of Luke witnesses to the sureness and faithfulness of the Word of God as fulfilled in Jesus. Luke's prologue is keen on stressing how certain and reliable are the things that Theophilus ("lover, beloved, or friend, of God") has been taught concerning the salvation events brought by Jesus. The reading then jumps to Jesus' inaugural homily in his hometown, when he got up to read at the Sabbath synagogue service. What he reads from Isa 61 is really the program of his mission, that for which he has been anointed (= "made Messiah") with the Spirit: to bring the Good News (see Isa 40:9; 41:27; 52:7) to the afflicted and shattered, really, to proclaim the final Jubilee of forgiveness and redemption ("liberty" in Luke 4:18 and Isa 61:1 is the same as in Lev 25:10).