

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 11:2-15

Year A - Advent 3, Text: Matthew 11:2-15
Year A - Advent 3, Text: Matthew 11:2-11

In Matthew 9:25–38, we read of Jesus working in the cities and villages of Galilee, teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God, and healing people of their diseases and sicknesses. In Matthew 10:1–4, Jesus gathers His disciples together and gives them authority over unclean spirits and power to cure every disease and sickness. In 10:5–42, He instructs His disciples with regard to their coming mission. In 11:1, He resumes His teaching ministry in the cities of Galilee.

Verses 11:2–3: Back in Matthew 3:1–12, we read of John the Baptist carrying out his prophetic ministry, proclaiming his radical message and baptizing those who came to hear him. However, in 11:2, we are told that John is in prison. The reason for his imprisonment is given in Matthew 14:1–12.

When John is given information about Jesus’ ministry, he sends some of his disciples to Jesus with a question, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

Why did John do this? Some suggest that although John believed in Jesus as the promised Messiah, some of his disciples did not — and John sent them to Jesus to see and hear for themselves. Others suggest that most likely John was wondering why Jesus, if He was indeed the Messiah, had permitted John’s imprisonment to take place and had not intervened to prevent it or to bring about his release. Most likely he sent some of his followers to Jesus to ask on his behalf, “If you are the liberator that we have been waiting for, why am I cooped up like a bird in a cage? If you are not the liberator we have been expecting, who will he be and what will he seek to achieve?”

Verses 11:4–5: Jesus responds to John’s inquiry by referring to, and expanding on, predictions expressed in Isaiah 35:5–6. When the Messianic Age breaks in, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the crippled will be empowered to run, and those unable to speak will be enabled to do so. Jesus adds references to lepers being

healed, the dead being raised, and God’s Good News being proclaimed to the poor.

Although Jesus does these things, He is carrying out more than a mere healing ministry. His signs and wonders invite people to ask and ponder some powerful questions. “Who is this Person? Why is He doing these things?” The message embedded in Jesus’ actions is this: “What Jesus is doing are things that the prophets said would take place when the Messianic Age broke in. Is the Messianic Age now breaking into history? Is Jesus really our long-awaited Messiah? Will He bring to pass the hopes we have embraced for centuries?”

Verse 11:6: The Jewish people would have been delighted to have someone heal all their aches and pains, fulfill their dreams, and give them dominion over the nations of the world — in particular over the Roman Empire of Jesus’ day. However, when people began to understand that Jesus’ achievements did not match their dreams and hopes, would they take offense at Him? Blessed are those who would not do that!

Verses 11:7–8: In these verses, Jesus refers to some of the misguided hopes and dreams that many Jewish people embraced. In Jesus’ time, the Jewish people were not supposed to produce or use coins with a human image on them. Hence, some of the Herodians produced coins with symbols of reeds bending over because of strong winds blowing on them. Those who belonged to the Herodian upper class were wealthy and had plenty of those coins. However, Jesus’ ministry had nothing to do with promising riches to people; it had to do with calling them to a righteous, servant way of life.

There were those who saw the Messianic Age as a time when many would be clothed in soft robes — the expensive robes that only the affluent ruling class could afford. Jesus says “No!” to that hope. Those who identified with His mission were not to expect to enjoy a lavish lifestyle and live in a palace! Indeed, as

time went by, Jesus' popularity with most Galileans declined. Only His faithful disciples remained loyal to Him — and even they did not understand the full implications of Jesus' Person, message, and ministry until they became aware of His resurrection and witnessed His ascension.

Verses 11:9–11: In these final three verses, Jesus reveals John's true greatness and defines the meaning of his mission. He points out that John the Baptist is something more than a prophet. He is the immediate forerunner of the Messiah, that precursor whose identification as Elijah in late Judaism was the fulfillment of a long-awaited dream.

Matthew's scriptural references combine Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1. The angel of the exodus who preceded God's people evolves into a messenger sent before the advent of God Himself. An addition to Malachi by a later editor (Malachi 3:22–23) identified that messenger with Elijah, and Ben Sira (Sirach 48:10) in his "praise of the patriarchs" repeated this belief.

Matthew represents Jesus affirming this Old Testament tradition and identifying this Elijah as John the Baptist. No man in Israel's history surpasses John. Yet John belongs to the Old Testament era, to the era of prophecy, not to the New Testament era in which all hopes are fulfilled God's way through the ministry of Jesus.

John stood at the end of an epoch, an epoch which, when compared with the new day now arrived with the coming of Jesus, looked like shadow compared with reality, or half-light compared with the sun's midday brilliance.