

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

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

Matthew 4:12-25

Year A - Epiphany 3, Text: Matthew 4:12-25
Year A - Epiphany 3, Text: Matthew 4:12-23

In Matthew 3:13–17, we read about Jesus’ baptism. In 4:1–11, we read about His temptation. There is reason to believe that both events took place to the northeast of Jerusalem — the first at Bethany beyond the Jordan River, and the second possibly to the west of the Jordan River, but both just to the north of the Dead Sea.

Verses 4:12–13: When Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been arrested, He relocates from Judea to Galilee in the north, where He moves from His hometown Nazareth to a house in Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Verse 4:14: Matthew sees in Jesus’ move to this location the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1–7, a prophecy made after the Assyrian invasion of Galilee under Tiglath-pileser III.

Verses 4:15–16: The passage celebrated Isaiah’s prediction of the birth of a royal child destined to be the redeemer of Israel. Isaiah foretold the glory of that part of the Holy Land that had fared worst under the Assyrian invader. Matthew transfers the name “the Sea-Road” (which in Isaiah designated the highway from Damascus to Carmel) to the road along the Sea of Galilee — but he retains the essential message of Isaiah. Galilee, a region despised by Jesus’ contemporaries in Jerusalem, is destined to witness the most significant events in Jesus’ public life and ministry. Matthew’s term, “Galilee of the Gentiles,” reveals his keen interest in the salvation of “pagan” non-believers.

Verse 4:17: Matthew portrays Jesus’ message as a replica of that of John the Baptist, which underscores the link and continuity between their respective missions.

Jesus now begins to proclaim His central message (v. 17), “Repent for the Kingdom of God has come near!” His hearers are to change their whole way of thinking, and focus on the amazing truth that the Kingdom of God has finally broken into human history. Jesus not

only proclaims that message with His lips, but demonstrates the nature of His Father’s Kingdom throughout His servant life.

The translation “has come near” is a little misleading. It should be translated, “has come” or has broken into history. The Kingdom of God is not merely on its way into history. It has arrived! Jesus is that Kingdom! He teaches that Kingdom. He models that Kingdom! His call to His hearers is, “Come on board with Me!”

Verses 4:18–22: In v. 18, Jesus sees two fishermen, Simon (who is called Peter), and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea. In v. 19, Jesus summons these brothers to follow Him and to be equipped to serve as “fishers of people.” They immediately leave their nets and follow Jesus.

In v. 21, something similar takes place. Jesus sees James and John, sons of Zebedee, in a boat with their father mending their nets. When Jesus calls these two brothers, they immediately leave their boat and their father and follow Jesus.

The spirit and character of the narrative is, most likely, the result of its constant retelling in the apostolic preaching. Nothing is said of the psychological reactions of those called (in contrast with John 1:38ff); only the call and response are referred to. Matthew focuses on the theological motif.

Verse 4:23: Jesus now travels throughout Galilee, teaching in Jewish synagogues and proclaiming the Good News of the breaking in of the Kingdom of God in His Person and Message. He also cures the diseases and sicknesses that those with whom He comes into contact are suffering.

Here it is important to note the message of Isaiah 35:5–6, which states that when the Messianic Age breaks into history, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the crippled will leap like a deer, and the mute will be given the ability to speak.

