

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Year A
RCL



Isaiah 9:1-4
Psalm 27:1, 5-13
Matthew 4:12-23

The Collect

The Collect

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 9:1-4

There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness –
on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Psalm 27:1, 5-13

Dominus illuminatio

- 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? *
the LORD is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?
- 5 One thing have I asked of the LORD;
one thing I seek; *
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the
days of my life;
- 6 To behold the fair beauty of the LORD *
and to seek him in his temple.
- 7 For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his
shelter; *
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling
and set me high upon a rock.
- 8 Even now he lifts up my head *
above my enemies round about me.
- 9 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation
with sounds of great gladness; *
I will sing and make music to the LORD.
- 10 Hearken to my voice, O LORD, when I call; *
have mercy on me and answer me.

11 You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." *
Your face, LORD, will I seek.

12 Hide not your face from me, *
nor turn away your servant in displeasure.

13 You have been my helper;
cast me not away; *
do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.

Matthew 4:12-23

when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of
death
light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fisher-

men. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

SERMON

NPR interviewed Imam Khalid Latif, a Muslim chaplain for the New York Police Department, about the sort of treatment he receives as a Muslim. One incident really hit me. He was at a ceremony marking the anniversary of 9/11, in his NYPD Inspector's uniform but wearing a skull cap, when he was approached by agents from the Secret Service. They told him that someone had spotted him from a roof top, and that they needed “to check his credentials, just in case”.

“Just in case what?”, he asked.¹ I ask the same thing. That wouldn't have happened if he had been identified as a Methodist. We mostly leave Methodists alone. The three great Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, belong to the same family but you wouldn't know it from the way we act. When you and I were

¹ <http://www.upworthy.com/the-secret-service-approach-an-nypd-chaplain-at-a-911-service-then-a-victims-mother-step-s-in>

young, Jews couldn't belong to the Country Club or swim in the pool. Why? Were we afraid a Rabbi would sneak up under water and circumcise people? The contemporary political environment has so successfully linked Islam to terrorism by incessantly referring to “Islamic Terrorism” that it is no longer possible to hear the one without thinking of the other. The worst fights are family fights.

We read today from Matthew. Matthew is the most Jewish of the four Gospel accounts. Matthew’s account seeks to show us connections between the prophets and the actions of Jesus so it is, naturally, Matthew who points out:

He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,

on the road by the sea, across the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow
of death
light has dawned.”

For Matthew, claims are to be weighed in the scales of Scripture, and he is showing us that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Matthew was speaking to a predominantly Jewish community. For people of his community, all was confusion and uncertainty. There was no shortage of street preachers and would-be prophets in Jerusalem, and in the confusion of voices, Jesus’ voice would have struggled to be heard. We 21st Century Christians probably don’t need that much convincing. We have heard the story since our childhood and we’re pretty sold on who Jesus was.

That’s what makes it so remarkable that His voice

WAS heard, then and into our time, 2,000 years later. Matthew would say it is because the coming of Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy. I don't for a minute disagree, but I also think there's more to it than that. By any measure of human reason, the story we have heard all our lives is preposterous. God, the creator of all, submits to the indignity of a human birth? God, the first and last, dies? A dead person rises? There's no way to wrap human reason around this. It seems impossible that anybody would have initially believed it – unless of course it were true, and people had witnessed it. Even before it all played out, Matthew relates the powerful effect Jesus could have on ordinary people.

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for

people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

That's an astounding response to a trivial conversation. Walk away from your nets? Leave your livelihood? As Christians, we're not surprised but, in our confused time, it is hard to remember that Jesus did not touch only Christians and first century Jewish fishermen.

In Islam, Jesus, is understood to be the penultimate prophet and messenger of Allah and al-Masih, the Arabic term for Messiah, the “Christ”, sent to guide the Children of Israel with a new revelation: al-Injīl (Arabic for "the Gospel"). Jesus is believed to be a prophet, who neither married nor had any children, and is reflected as a significant fig-

ure, being mentioned in the Quran in 93 ayaat with various titles attached such as “Spirit of God” and the “Word of God” among other relational terms, directly and indirectly, over 180 times.

The Quran and most Hadith (testimonial reports) mention Jesus to have been born a “pure boy” (without sin) to Mary as the result of virginal conception, similar to the event of the Annunciation in Christianity. In Islamic theology, Jesus is believed to have performed many miracles, several being mentioned in the Quran such as speaking as an infant, healing various ailments like blindness, raising the dead to life, making birds out of clay and breathing life into them. Like all prophets in Islamic thought, Jesus is also called a Muslim (which means “one who submits to the will of God”), as he preached that his followers should adopt the “straight path”.²

I think that may come as a surprise to many of you, given the current political environment in which we are

² Wikipedia

urged, virtually from every street corner, to view Islam as our sworn enemy and the antithesis of our faith but it is so: Islam understands Jesus differently than do we, but they worship the same God and hold Jesus in the highest honor. Nevertheless, it is convenient for some of us to see them as enemy, and some of them to see us the same. Why do we do this sort of thing? We are all children of God, yet we behave in the worst possible way toward each other, clinging to our individual tribes and refusing to see our brothers and sisters as anything other than illegitimate competitors for the Father's love. Paul, in his letter to the church at Corinth, writes:

NOW I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that

there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you?

But...but...Islamic terrorism! They started it. What are we to do but to respond in kind? It is this question which we will examine during Lent. For now, ask yourself if Jesus, as He was taken into custody by the Romans, as he heard the cries of “Give us Barabbas”, thought He had no alternative but to oppose those who would kill him by force and violence.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

My little brother, who you may remember as “The Flying Dutchman” on WKEE, and I had extensive fights when we were younger over which of us our parents loved more. That's stupid. We grew up and stopped doing that. We should do that as well, don't you think?

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be
gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give
you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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