

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Luke 4:14-30

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):

Year C - Epiphany 3, Texts: Lk. 4:16-30

RCL (Revised Common Lectionary): Year C - Epiphany 3 & 4, Texts: Lk. 4:14-21, and Lk. 4:21-30

The LSB Lectionary covers Luke 4:16-30 as a whole (Jesus visit to Nazareth). These same verses are split into two Sundays in the RCL. As Wendt warns: If these passages are dealt with on two successive Sundays, people need to be made aware of the implications of the larger narrative.

After His baptism and temptation, when Jesus returns to Galilee, begins to teach in synagogues, and is initially praised by everyone (Luke 4:14-15). But the tone quickly changes.

Verses 4:16-19: On this occasion, Jesus is invited to preach in the synagogue in His hometown, Nazareth. He begins by reading Isaiah 61:1–2 and a section of 58:6 (“to let the oppressed go free”) — passages that pointed to the coming of the Messiah and the conditions that would prevail during the Messianic Age.

Verses 4:20-22: After reading from the scroll, Jesus states, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Indeed, in Jesus, the Messianic Age has come! Some are puzzled by what Jesus says. Some become angry and ask how it is possible that a mere “son of Joseph” can say such things and make such a claim.

Often, people like to end the story of Jesus’ visit to Nazareth with verse 21 (“all spoke well of him”). But this gives the wrong impression. The notion that those present in the synagogue when Jesus preached His first sermon in His hometown were impressed with what they heard is totally misleading. They were furious — to the point of wanting to kill Him!

Jesus’ opponents understand that Jesus read selectively from Isaiah — which He was entitled to do according to rabbinic tradition. However, they are furious that He makes no reference to the following hopes expressed in Isaiah 60:1–61:6:

- God’s glory will embrace His so-called Chosen People forever (60:2). Oppression by other nations will cease (61:1).

- Rulers and people of other nations will come to the Holy Land, bringing with them their wealth — across the oceans in ships and across the land on camels (60:3, 5b, 6, 11; 61:6b). Indeed, God’s people will suck into their own land (and hands?) the wealth of the Gentiles as a child sucks milk from its mother’s breasts (60:16a).
- God will pour out His vengeance on any Gentile nation that will not serve the Jewish people (60:12; 61:2a). Gentiles will rebuild any Jewish structures that they have reduced to rubble (60:10a), using the best of timbers from Lebanon in the process (60:13; see also 60:17). They will also free God’s people from having to do menial tasks such as caring for animals and farming the land (61:5). Possibly the suggestion is also that God’s people will be spared having to do menial tasks so that they might devote life to studying the Torah, their scriptures.
- Diaspora Jews scattered around the Mediterranean world will return to the Holy Land, bringing their silver and gold with them (60:9).
- God’s people will live in their land in peace and security (60:18). The gates that lead into their towns and cities will always remain open (60:11a). The people will all be righteous, possess the land forever, and increase greatly in numbers (60:21, 22a).

Verses 4:23-27: When Jesus’ hearers express their rage toward Him, He responds with words indicating that although His hearers believe that they, as Jews, are God’s genetically special people, in Old Testament times God used Elijah and Elisha to minister to Gentiles, to non-Jews. Elijah ministered to the widow of Zarephath; Elisha ministered to Naaman, a leper from Syria.

Verses 4:28-30: If Jesus’ audience rejects what He has to say, God will turn His attention to the Gentiles once again. At this, Jesus’ hearers become enraged, drive Him out of Nazareth, and make plans to kill Him by throwing Him off a cliff. Jesus slips away.

