

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International
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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

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

Mark 1:9-15

Year B - Lent 1, Text: Mark 1:9-15
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One of the primary themes in the Gospel of Mark is Jesus' confrontation and victory over the powers of darkness. In Mark, the first miracle Jesus will perform after His temptation involves a struggle with a demoniac (1:21–28). While preaching in synagogues throughout Galilee, He will throw out numerous demons (1:39). Until Jesus takes control of a land and the hearts of its inhabitants, they are under the control of demonic powers. Just as the ancient Israelites entered occupied territory when they entered the land of the Canaanites, so too is Judah occupied territory when Jesus appears on the scene.

Mark 1:9–15: Jesus, who is living in the northern region of Galilee when John begins his work, heads south so that John might baptize Him also (Mark 1:9). Jesus does not need baptism for the forgiveness of any sins of his own. He seeks baptism by John to identify Himself with the New Age that His Father is about to begin with His ministry. After all, Jesus is the new Son of God. As the old “son” of God, Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea and the River Jordan, so the new Son of God must pass through the water of John's baptism. Jesus will lead His people into the inheritance of an eternal relationship with the Father.

As Jesus comes out of the water after His baptism, He sees the heavens *torn apart* and the Spirit descending like a dove on Him (1:10). Centuries before, the prophet had cried out, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down” (Isaiah 64:1). At Jesus' baptism, the heavens are indeed torn open, and the Spirit comes down in a form that resembles a dove and hovers over the head of Jesus. The rabbis (teachers) spoke of the dove as a symbol of the nation of Israel; see also Hosea 7:11, 9:11, and 11:11. At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit in the form of a dove hovers over the head of the new Son of God, the true Israel. Jesus will lead a life directed entirely by the Holy Spirit.

At His baptism, Jesus is anointed into the office defined by the voice from heaven: “You are My Son, the

Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (1:11). As noted earlier, this statement reflects Psalm 2:7 — a psalm used in ancient Israel at the anointing of a king from the line of David. Its use at Jesus' baptism declares that God has kept His promise; the line of David will not die out. Jesus is, indeed, the long-awaited descendant of David, the long-expected Messianic King, who has come to rule God's people and empower them to carry out God's mission to the world.

The direction that the life of this Messianic King will take will be different from what many are expecting. “With you I am well pleased” is a quotation from the first of Isaiah's Servant Songs (42:1–4; note v. 1). As Messianic King, Jesus will be The Servant. He will be despised, rejected, and His people will do their very worst to Him. They will finally crucify Him! However, through His death He will lavish on them the offer of a complete, perfect, and eternal pardon, and draw them into a relationship with Himself in which they will find true life, now and forever.

After Jesus is anointed into office as the long-awaited King and the nature of His Kingship is defined, the Spirit leads Him into the wilderness for forty days. After passing through water, Old Israel was taken into a wilderness for forty years to be tested and tried — but did little else but sin and complain. The people murmured, grumbled, and sinned constantly. Although Israel's behavior in the wilderness brought forth death and alienation, Jesus' sustained obedience brings forth the new Israel of God.

Verses 1:12–13: After His baptism, Jesus — the new Israel, the new Son of God — is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark's temptation narrative consists of only three words, “tempted by Satan” (1:12). In their respective narratives, Matthew (4:1–11) and Luke (4:1–13) list three confrontations between Jesus and Satan. Although both Matthew and Luke conclude their temptation narratives with a reference to Satan departing from Jesus, Mark

makes no such statement. Most likely, Mark's point is that throughout His ministry, Jesus engages in a nonstop battle with Satan, and He finally conquers him when He gives away His life at Calvary. In confronting Jesus, the Servant-King, Satan does not merely meet his match; he meets his Conqueror!

Verse 1:13b states, "Jesus was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." According to the rabbis of Jesus' day, the first fall into sin took place when some of the angels refused to honor Adam and Eve. But now the angels are serving and honoring the New Adam, the true Son of God. Furthermore, the prophets stated that when the Messianic Age finally broke in, animals would live together in peace, and would not harm one another or humanity (see Isaiah 11:6–9; 65:25; and Hosea 2:18).

Verses 1:14-15: After John is arrested, Jesus returns to Galilee to launch His public ministry. He begins it by proclaiming a message that causes many Jewish hearts to beat wildly with excitement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). We might summarize Jesus' message as follows:

The age that you and your ancestors have longed for has finally arrived — in Me! Your dreams are about to be fulfilled. The kingdom of God has broken into history! Change your whole way of thinking and living. Rejoice! Embrace the good news of the Messianic Age in all that you believe, think, say, and do.

When Jesus declared that the kingdom of God had broken into history in and through Him, He was doing something that was politically dangerous. To announce any new kingdom was to challenge the power of the Herods — and behind the Herods were the Roman authorities and emperor.

Some Jewish expectations about the dawning of the Messianic Age were extravagant. However, the setting for Jesus' opening statement is anything but spectacular. There is no display of cosmic fireworks when Jesus speaks. Jesus' audience sees no halo around His head, no regal clothing, no retinue of servants or royal guards, no pomp, and no splendor. Indeed, the setting and Jesus' appearance are anticlimactic to the Jewish religious and political leaders.

To the best of their knowledge, Jesus is the son of Joseph the carpenter and his wife Mary. Even so, the

claims the New Testament makes about who Jesus is, and the implications of His opening statement, are profound.

Mark's message in a nutshell: The Old Testament narrative reveals the origins of the Jewish people, their rescue from bondage in Egypt, God making a covenant with them at Sinai, their gaining possession of the Promised Land and establishing Jerusalem and the temple system.

Mark's narrative focuses on Jesus preparing to visit the temple and deal with its religious system — its "salvation marketing system." Prior to dealing with the temple system, Jesus reveals His Father's love and will for people of all nations and lands. He invites people to leave the "kingdoms of the world" and to enter into the "Kingdom of God" — and to believe and do what membership in that Kingdom implies.

Throughout the first half of Mark's account, Jesus discourages people and evil spirits alike from declaring who He is. Although He wanted people to come to faith in Him as God's Messiah, He wanted them to see clearly what kind of Messiah He had come to be. He consistently refused to use His power to benefit Himself in any way. The people, the authorities and His disciples found it difficult to relate His lifestyle to traditional expectations about what the Messiah would be like and what He would accomplish. Although they were waiting for the coming of their Messiah, they got Jesus of Nazareth — God's Messiah — instead.