

The Third Sunday After the Epiphany
Cycle A
Revised

Isaiah 9:1-4

The difficult text of Isaiah 9:1 (Hebrew: Isaiah 8:23) has suggested to some that the prophecy begins in that verse. The great German form critic Albrecht Alt described the whole of 9:1-7 as an “accession oracle,” composed by Isaiah himself for King Hezekiah in which Hezekiah became “Son of God” at his accession to the throne. Within the context of the First Isaiah (Isaiah 1-39), however, the oracle changes function to point forward in time so as to describe Israel’s hope for a future king, who would save Jerusalem.

Psalms 27:1, 5-13

By omitting verses 2-4, the lectionary confuses the form of the Psalm, a form that is difficult for the expert even with the full Hebrew text before her to discern. At base, the Psalm cries out for deliverance (verses 9b-12), the function of a *lament*. The statements of confidence in the Psalm make it read like a Psalm of Trust, but in this case these affirmations create an irony. The Lord has saved the psalmist in the past. Why won't the Lord doing the same thing now? A lament urges the Lord to action on one’s behalf, and the function of Psalm 27 clearly does just that.

1 Corinthians 1:10–18

Writing this letter from Ephesus in Asia Minor, Paul had learned that the church in Corinth contained competing factions named after those who baptized the disputants: Cephas, Apollos, and Paul. Paul warned his readers that he had no intention of organizing a faction within the church by his baptismal activities. The emphasis upon unity in 1 Corinthians reminds some readers of the similar emphasis on unity (Hebrew: *yaxad*) among the Qumran sectarians addressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Matthew 4:12–23

The word “Galilee” (Hebrew: *Galil*, Aramaic: *Galila'*, “circuit” or “district,” short, perhaps for “District of the Gentiles”) refers to the region around Lake Kinneret (“Sea of Galilee”), populated mainly by non-Jews in the time of Jesus. In this region, Jews lived primarily in Jewish towns like Nazareth, Cana, and Capernaum, whereas great cities like Tiberias and Caesarea Philippi (Banyas) were largely non-Jewish. Capernaum (modern *Tell-Hum* in Arabic, Hebrew: *Kfar Nahum* = “Nahum’s Village”), located on the northern coast of the Lake, finds no mention in the Hebrew Bible but does appear in the Gospels as Jesus’ adult home and shows up as well in the works of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus. The citation of Isaiah 9:1–2 in verses 15–16 typifies the way in which the author has Jesus fulfill specific scripture throughout the Gospel.