

**Matthew 2:23—3:3**

Judg 13:5, 7  
Lk 1:26; 2:39, 51  
Jn 1:46  
Is 11:1; 53:2

reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

**2. PRELUDE TO THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS\***

Mk 1:1–8  
Lk 3:1–18  
Jn 1:19–34

**John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness**

Mk 4:17

Acts 2:38; 13:24;  
19:4

Jn 1:23

**3** <sup>1</sup>In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>“Repent,\* for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” <sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

enim, qui quaerebant animam pueri». <sup>21</sup>Qui surgens accepit puerum et matrem eius et venit in terram Israel. <sup>22</sup>Audiens autem quia Archelaus regnaret in Iudaea pro Herode patre suo, timuit illum ire; et admonitus in somnis, secessit in partes Galilaeae <sup>23</sup>et veniens habitavit in civitate, quae vocatur Nazareth, ut adimpleretur, quod dictum est per Prophetas: «Nazaraeus vocabitur». [3] <sup>1</sup>In diebus autem illis venit Ioannes Baptista praedicans in deserto Iudaeae <sup>2</sup>et dicens: «Paenitentiam agite; appropinquavit enim regnum caelorum». <sup>3</sup>Hic est enim, qui dictus est per Isaiam prophetam dicentem: «*Vox clamantis in deserto: / “Parate viam Domini, / rectas facite semitas eius!”*». <sup>4</sup>Ipse autem Ioannes habebat vestimen-

not go into great detail. Herod probably died in March or April of the year 4 BC. His son Archelaus then ruled as ethnarch in Judea, Samaria and Idumea until AD 6, when he was deposed and exiled as a result of protests over his brutality. Therefore, his jurisdiction did not cover Galilee, where Nazareth was situated. We can learn from Joseph’s behaviour here: “In the different circumstances of his life, St Joseph never refuses to think, never neglects his responsibilities. On the contrary, he puts his human experience at the service of faith. When he returns from Egypt, learning ‘that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there’. In other words, he had learned to work within the divine plan. And to confirm that he was doing the right thing, Joseph received an instruction to return to Galilee” (St Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 42).

Jesus was regarded by everyone as a native of Nazareth—“the Nazarene”—and there was a tendency to be dismissive of him on this account (see Jn 1:46; 7:32). Even in St Paul’s time, non-believing Jews tried to humiliate Christians by calling them Nazarenes (cf. Acts 24:5). There is no passage in the Prophets that explicitly says what St Matthew quotes here (v. 23). The most likely explanation is that he is referring to Isaiah 11:1, which announces a descendant of David—a shoot, *neser*, from Jesse—on whom shall rest all the gifts of the Spirit of the Lord.

**\*3:1—4:11** In this section St Matthew covers the immediate lead-up to Jesus’ public ministry. It involves places that were full of salvific significance in the history of the people of Israel—the river Jordan (v. 5), the gateway of the promised land (cf. Josh 3:8), and, more importantly, the wilderness (3:1; 4:1), the place where the people were put to the test and cleansed (Deut 8:2), but also the place where God spoke to the heart of his beloved Israel (Hos 2:16) and where the wonders that the Lord did for his people took place (Is 42:11; 43:19). These are the places where the Kingdom of God will be inaugurated, with the arrival of the Messiah, announced and acknowledged by John the Baptist, the last of the prophets.

**3:1–12** John the Baptist is reminiscent of some Old Testament prophets (see 2 Kings 1:8; Zech 13:4–5). The quotation from Isaiah 40 identifies John’s prophetic mission—first, to prepare the Jewish people to receive the Kingdom of God; second, to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah who ushers in that kingdom. In the Baptist’s teaching (vv. 8–12), the evangelist subtly underlines the fact that the message of John is the very same as that of Jesus: the Kingdom is about to come (v. 2; cf. 4:17), and the attitude of Pharisees and priests is to be deplored (v. 7; cf. 12:34; 23:33); these people are like barren trees (v. 10; cf. 7:19). Here we have the first instance

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.”

*Is 40:3*

<sup>4</sup>Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, <sup>6</sup>and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.\*

*Mt 11:8–9  
2 Kings 1:8; 2:8–13*

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruit that befits repentance, <sup>9</sup>and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup>Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

*Mt 12:34; 23:33*

*Jn 8:39  
Rom 4:12; 9:7–8*

<sup>11</sup>“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

*Mt 7:19  
Lk 13:7–9  
Jn 15:6*

*Mt 1:9–11  
Lk 3:21–22  
Jn 1:15, 19–34  
Acts 1:5; 11:16;  
13:25*

*Mt 13:30*

### Jesus is baptized

*Mk 1:9–11  
Lk 3:21–22*

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup>John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup>But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to

tum de pilis cameli et zonam pelliceam circa lumbos suos; esca autem eius erat locustae et mel silvestre. <sup>5</sup>Tunc exibat ad eum Hierosolyma et omnis Iudaea et omnis regio circa Iordanem, <sup>6</sup>et baptizabantur in Iordane flumine ab eo, confitentes peccata sua. <sup>7</sup>Videns autem multos pharisaeorum et sadducaeorum venientes ad baptismum suum, dixit eis: «Progenies viperarum, quis demonstravit vobis fugere a futura ira? <sup>8</sup>Facite ergo fructum dignum paenitentiae <sup>9</sup>et ne velitis dicere intra vos: “Patrem habemus Abraham”; dico enim vobis quoniam potest Deus de lapidibus istis suscitare Abrahae filios. <sup>10</sup>Iam enim securis ad radicem arborum posita est; omnis ergo arbor, quae non facit fructum bonum, exciditur et in ignem mittitur. <sup>11</sup>Ego quidem vos baptizo in aqua in paenitentiam; qui autem post me venturus est, fortior me est, cuius non sum dignus calcamentia portare; ipse vos baptizabit in Spiritu Sancto et igni, <sup>12</sup>cuius ventilabrum in manu sua, et permundabit aream suam et congregabit triticum suum in horreum, paleas autem comburet igni inextinguibili». <sup>13</sup>Tunc venit Iesus a Galilaea in Iordanem ad Ioannem, ut baptizaretur ab eo. <sup>14</sup>Ioannes

of Christian catechesis, which passes on the truth that Jesus came to teach us.

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 1). This is a way of referring to the Kingdom of God. The phrase means that God is intervening powerfully and mercifully in the life of his people. The original plan of creation was shattered by the rebellion of man’s sin. To put the plan back into effect, a new intervention by God was called for; this happened through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Son of God. This intervention was preceded by a series of preliminary stages—salvation history, recorded in the Old Testament. Jesus is the cornerstone of the Kingdom of God which the Baptist declares to be imminent. But the Kingdom of God that Jesus establishes is a spiritual kingdom, devoid of the nationalistic trap-

pings the Jews of his time expected it to have. To be a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh does not ensure salvation; for that, what is needed is a personal conversion which translates into the deeds of a holy life in the eyes of God: “Repent” (v. 2), “Bear fruit that befits repentance” (v. 8), “good fruit” (v. 10). Citizenship in the Kingdom of God ushered in by the redemptive work of Christ requires radical changes of attitude and behaviour (cf. 9:17; Mk 2:22; Lk 5:37–39).

**3:13–17** Why did Jesus have to undergo this baptism if he had no sin to cleanse (cf. Heb 4:15)? The evangelists do not dodge this question. Nor does John the Baptist himself—as can be seen from his reluctance to baptize Jesus (v. 14). But neither the Gospels nor Christian tradi-

**Matthew 3:16–4:4**

Ezek 1:1  
1 Pet 4:14

Gen 22:2  
Ps 2:7; Is 42:1  
Mt 12:18; 17:5  
Mk 1:11; 9:7  
Lk 3:22; 9:35

Mk 1:12–13  
Lk 4:1–13

Ex 34:28  
1 Kings 19:8  
Heb 4:15

Gen 3:1–7  
Deut 8:3

Wis 16:26  
Deut 8:3

fulfil all righteousness.” Then he consented.\* <sup>16</sup>And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened<sup>g</sup> and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; <sup>17</sup>and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved son,<sup>h</sup> with whom I am well pleased.”

**Jesus fasts and is tempted**

**4** <sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup>But he answered, “It is written,

autem prohibebat eum dicens: «Ego a te debeo baptizari, et tu venis ad me?». <sup>15</sup>Respondens autem Iesus dixit ei: «Sine modo, sic enim decet nos implere omnem iustitiam». Tunc dimittit eum. <sup>16</sup>Baptizatus autem Iesus, confestim ascendit de aqua; et ecce aperti sunt ei caeli, et vidit Spiritum Dei descendentem sicut columbam et venientem super se. <sup>17</sup>Et ecce vox de caelis dicens: «Hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi complacui». **[4]** <sup>1</sup>Tunc Iesus ductus est in desertum a Spiritu, ut tentaretur a Diabolo. <sup>2</sup>Et cum ieiunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit. <sup>3</sup>Et accedens tentator dixit ei: «Si Filius Dei es, dic, ut lapides isti panes fiant». <sup>4</sup>Qui respondens dixit: «Scriptum est: / “*Non in pane solo vivet homo, / sed in omni verbo, quod procedit de ore Dei*”». <sup>5</sup>Tunc assumit eum Diabolus in sanctam civitatem et statuit eum supra pinnaculum templi <sup>6</sup>et dicit ei: «Si Filius Dei es, mitte te deorsum. Scriptum est enim: “*Angelis suis mandabit de te, / et in manibus tollent te, / ne forte offendas*”

tion, which produced the Gospels and which follows them, omit this episode. The narrative allows us to deduce that, in going to John for baptism, Jesus is showing that he too supports the plan devised by God to prepare his people by the words and works of his prophets. In this way our Lord fulfils “all righteousness” (v. 15), that is, does everything that God laid down. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 536 teaches, the baptism of Jesus represents the “acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God’s suffering servant”. In other words, Jesus is the Servant foretold by the prophet Isaiah; the servant who, as the Lamb brought to the slaughter (cf. Jn 1:29), meekly and humbly accepts the mission his Father gives him. Jesus allows himself to be baptized because this prefigures his baptism of blood, his death on the cross, for the remission of sins. Out of love he submits completely to the Father’s will, and the Father is moved and is pleased to accept his Son’s offering (v. 17). The very beginning of Christ’s mission (to die on account of our sins, in order to enable us to rise to a new life), signalled in this passage, made Christ’s baptism a sign of our Baptism. That is how Christian doctrine reads the episode: “Through Baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Jesus, who in his own baptism anticipates his death and resurrection. The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be

reborn of water and the Spirit so as to become the Father’s beloved son in the Son and ‘walk in newness of life’ (Rom 6:4)” (ibid., 537). See the notes on Mk 1:9–11 and Lk 3:21–22.

**4:1–11** Before beginning his messianic work and promulgating the New Law in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus prepares himself by prayer and fasting in the wilderness. Moses acted in a similar way before promulgating, in the name of God, the Old Law at Sinai (Ex 34:28); and Elijah travelled forty days in the wilderness to advance his mission of promoting the Law (1 Kings 19:4–8). The Church, too, encourages us to seek spiritual renewal during the forty days of Lent: “Lord, protect us in our struggle against evil. As we begin the discipline of Lent, make this day holy by our self-denial” (*Roman Missal*, Ash Wednesday, Opening Prayer). See also the note on Lk 4:1–13.

In this episode of the temptations, Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Israel, in contrast to the old. Jesus is tempted, as the Chosen People were during their forty years in the desert. The Israelites succumbed to temptation: they railed against God when they suffered hunger (Ex 16:1ff), demanded a miracle when they were short of water (Ex 17:1–7), and worshipped the golden calf (Ex 32). Jesus, by contrast, overcomes temptation and, in doing so, shows what sort of Messiah he is—not one who seeks personal glory, or political success, but one who humbly does the will of God as it is set out in the Scriptures.

<sup>g</sup> Other ancient authorities add to him <sup>h</sup> Or my Son, my (or the) Beloved

‘Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple,  
<sup>6</sup>and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will give his angels charge of you,’

Ps 91:11, 12

and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”

Deut 6:16

<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; <sup>9</sup>and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! for it is written,

Deut 34:1  
Rev 21:10

‘You shall worship the Lord your God  
and him only shall you serve.’”

Deut 5:9; 6:13

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and behold, the angels came and ministered to him.

Jn 1:51  
Heb 1:6, 14

PART ONE

Jesus’ ministry in Galilee\*

Jesus begins to preach

Mk 1:14-15  
Lk 4:14-15

<sup>12</sup>Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; <sup>13</sup>and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of

Lk 3:20; 4:14-15  
Jn 3:24

*ad lapidem pedem tuum*”». <sup>7</sup>Ait illi Iesus: «Rursum scriptum est: “*Non tentabis Dominum Deum tuum*”». <sup>8</sup>Iterum assumit eum Diabolus in montem excelsum valde et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum <sup>9</sup>et dicit illi: «Haec tibi omnia dabo, si cadens adoraveris me». <sup>10</sup>Tunc dicit ei Iesus: «Vade, Satanas! Scriptum est enim: / “*Dominum Deum tuum adorabis / et illi soli servies*”». <sup>11</sup>Tunc reliquit eum Diabolus, et ecce

Jesus’ behaviour sets an example for every Christian. When we meet difficulties or temptation, we should not look for easy success or expect God to intervene in some dramatic way; trust in God, prayer, God’s grace and our fortitude will lead us, like Christ, to victory: “The Lord allowed the devil to tempt him so that we would have his example as well as the power of his help when we face temptation. [...] He overcame the enemy using the words of the Lord, not with the strength of his arm. [...] He overcame the mortal enemy of men as a man, not as God. He fought in that way to show us how we should fight. He overcame the enemy so that we too may overcome the enemy by following his example” (St Leo the Great, *Sermo 39 de Quadragesima*).

Kingdom of God has arrived. He starts by calling disciples and gathering to himself the new People of God (4:12-25). Then, as supreme Teacher, Lawgiver and Prophet, he promulgates the New Law of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29). His teaching is vouched for by “the works of the Messiah”, the miracles he performs (8:1-9:38).

The sending out of the apostles (10:1-42) and the deeds (11:1-12:50) and words (13:1-52) of Jesus show that he is more than a Teacher: he is the Messiah of Israel. The religious leaders of the Chosen People (11:16-12:45) obstinately reject him, but the signs are so evident (14:13-15:39) that St Peter acknowledges Jesus for what he truly is—the Messiah, the Son of God (16:13-20).

**\*4:12-16:20** Jesus’ ministry in Galilee now begins. In word and deed, he proclaims that the

**4:12-17** Jesus now makes Capernaum the base of his activity (v. 13). This city on the shores of

**Matthew 4:14–18**

**Jn 2:12; 4:43** Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

**Is 8:23–9:1** <sup>15</sup>“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
**Jn 7:52** toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles

**Lk 1:78f** — <sup>16</sup>the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light  
**Jn 1:9** and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

**Mt 10:7** <sup>17</sup>From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

**Mk 1:16–20**  
**Lk 5:1–11**  
**Jn 1:35–51**

**The first disciples are called**

<sup>18</sup>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.

angeli accesserunt et ministrabant ei. <sup>12</sup>Cum autem audisset quod Ioannes traditus esset, secessit in Galilaeam. <sup>13</sup>Et relicta Nazareth, venit et habitavit in Capharnaum maritimam <sup>14</sup>in finibus Zabulon et Nephthali, ut impleretur, quod dictum est per Isaiam prophetam dicentem: <sup>15</sup>«*Terra Zabulon et terra Nephthali, / ad viam maris, trans Iordanem, / Galilaea gentium; / populus, qui sedebat in tenebris, / lucem vidit magnam, / et sedentibus in regione et umbra mortis / lux orta est eis*». <sup>17</sup>Exinde coepit Iesus praedicare et dicere: «Paenitentiam agite; appropinquavit enim regnum caelorum». <sup>18</sup>Ambulans autem iuxta mare Galilaeae, vidit duos fratres, Simonem, qui vocatur Petrus, et Andream fratrem eius, mittentes rete in mare; erant enim piscatores. <sup>19</sup>Et ait illis: «Venite post me, et faciam vos piscatores hominum». <sup>20</sup>At illi continuo, relictis retibus, secuti

the Sea of Galilee epitomized the whole region: rich in natural resources and situated at the centre of trade routes, it had a mixed population, of which perhaps a third were Jewish. The episode concerning the centurion (8:5–13) suggests that people of different races and cultures lived in amity here. The region (a number of areas are mentioned: v. 15) was conquered by the Assyrians in the time of Isaiah, in 734 BC; it was laid waste and its people were ill-treated. Some of its Israelite population were deported, and sizeable numbers of foreigners were planted as colonists. That is why in this quotation from Isaiah 9 it is referred to as “Galilee of the Gentiles”. This was the region (the evangelist underlines) that was the first to receive the light of salvation and hear the preaching of the Messiah—in fulfilment of the prophecies.

With the Kingdom of heaven so close at hand (cf. the note on 3:1–12), Jesus’ preaching is an urgent call to repentance (see v. 17). For “Repent” many translations give “Be converted” or “Do penance”. “[Penance] means the inmost change of heart under the influence of the word of God and in the perspective of the kingdom. But penance also means changing one’s life in harmony with the change of heart, and in this sense doing penance is completed by bringing forth fruits worthy of penance: it is one’s whole existence that becomes penitential, that is to say, directed toward a continuous striving for what is

better. But doing penance is something authentic and effective only if it is translated into deeds and acts of penance. In this sense penance means [...] the concrete daily effort of a person, supported by God’s grace, to lose his or her own life for Christ as the only means of gaining it; an effort to put off the old man and put on the new; an effort to overcome in oneself what is of the flesh in order that what is spiritual may prevail; a continual effort to rise from the things of here below to the things of above, where Christ is” (John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 4).

**4:18–25** Although Jesus’ message (4:17) is the very same as John’s (3:2), unlike the Baptist, who simply announces that the Kingdom is on its way, our Lord begins to establish that Kingdom in human history by his works and his preaching. Thus, we see him calling his first disciples to follow him and leave everything behind: from these, later, he will pick the Twelve on whom he will found his Church. Paradoxically, Jesus chooses fishermen, uneducated men (see Acts 4:13), lest “anyone should think the faith of believers was attributable not to the action of God, but to eloquence and scholarship” (St Jerome, *Commentarii in Matthaem*, 5, 19). However, he made them “masters and leaders for the whole world, stewards of the divine mysteries; he commanded them to be like stars, to shine their light not only on the homeland of the Jews but on



<sup>19</sup>And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Ezek 47:10

<sup>20</sup>Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup>And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called to them. <sup>22</sup>Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Mt 19:27

Mt 8:21–22

<sup>23</sup>And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. <sup>24</sup>So his fame spread throughout all Syria and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. <sup>25</sup>And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Lk 4:14–25, 44;  
6:17–19; 9:35  
Mk 1:39; 3:7–12  
Acts 10:38  
Mk 6:55–56

Mk 3:7–8  
Lk 6:17–19

### 3. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT\*

#### The Beatitudes

Lk 6:20–26

**5** <sup>1</sup>Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

sunt eum. <sup>21</sup>Et procedens inde vidit alios duos fratres, Iacobum Zebedaei et Ioannem fratrem eius, in navi cum Zebedaeo patre eorum reficientes retia sua, et vocavit eos. <sup>22</sup>Illi autem statim, relicta navi et patre suo, secuti sunt eum. <sup>23</sup>Et circumibat Iesus totam Galilaeam, docens in synagogis eorum et praedicans evangelium regni et sanans omnem languorem et omnem infirmitatem in populo. <sup>24</sup>Et abiit opinio eius in totam Syriam; et obtulerunt ei omnes male habentes, variis languoribus et tormentis comprehensos, et qui daemonia habebant, et lunaticos et paralyticos, et curavit eos. <sup>25</sup>Et secutae sunt eum turbae multae de Galilaea et Decapoli et Hierosolymis et Iudaea et de trans Iordanem. [5] <sup>1</sup>Videns autem turbas, ascendit in montem; et cum sedisset, accesserunt ad eum discipuli eius; <sup>2</sup>et aperiens os suum docebat eos dicens: <sup>3</sup>«Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam

all men living everywhere in the world” (St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarium in Ioannem*, 12, 1).

The evangelist records the immediate and ready response of the apostles to the Lord’s call (cf. the note on Mk 1:16–20). St Matthew, from the start, singles out Peter among them (v. 18). “As a person, by his nature, Peter was a man; by grace, a Christian; and by a greater grace, an apostle, the first among all of the apostles” (St Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, 124, 5).

After his account of the calling of the disciples, the evangelist gives a brief summary of the early ministry of Jesus (v. 23) and its impact in Galilee and the surrounding area (vv. 24–25). Both Jesus’ preaching and his miracles are signs that he is establishing the Kingdom of God, signs of the divine grace and mercy that, through Christ, are offered to everyone, as the crowds that flock to him show. “The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God, promised over the ages in the Scriptures [...]. This Kingdom shone out before men in the world, in the works and in the presence of Christ” (Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 5).

**\*5:1—7:29** The Sermon on the Mount is the first of the five great discourses in which St Matthew brings together Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom of God. By placing our Lord’s teaching before his miracles (8:1—9:39), St Matthew may intend to stress the fact that Jesus is truly a Teacher; for that reason, St Matthew’s is often called the “didactic Gospel”. In this discourse we find a summary of the sorts of people who belong to the Kingdom (5:3–12) and it has much to say about true righteousness (justice)—the kinds of attitudes people should have towards the Law (5:17–48; 6:16–18), towards God (6:25–34), towards one another (6:1–4; 7:1–5), and in the way they pray (6:7–14; 7:7–11).

**5:1–12** The Beatitudes form the bedrock of and a prologue to the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus recalls the promises made to the Chosen People from the time of Abraham onwards, but he gives them a new character; the promise of possession of a land is transformed into that of belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven: “The Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity. They express the

## Matthew 5:3–9

Is 57:15; 61:1  
Lk 4:18  
Ps 126:6  
Is 61:2  
Ps 37:11  
Rev 7:16f

- 3“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
4“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
5“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.  
6“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.  
7“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.  
8“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.  
9“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Mt 18:33  
Jas 2:13  
Ps 24:3–4; 51:10;  
73:1  
Sir 4:11  
Heb 12:14  
Rev 22:4

ipsorum est regnum caelorum. <sup>4</sup>Beati, qui lugent, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur. <sup>5</sup>Beati mites, quoniam ipsi possidebunt terram. <sup>6</sup>Beati, qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam, quoniam ipsi saturabuntur. <sup>7</sup>Beati misericordes, quia ipsi misericordiam consequentur. <sup>8</sup>Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt. <sup>9</sup>Beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur. <sup>10</sup>Beati, qui persecutionem patiuntur propter iustitiam, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelo-

vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection; they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations; they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ’s disciples; they have begun in the lives of the Virgin Mary and all the saints” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1717).

The wording of blessing found in the Beatitudes belongs to traditional biblical language: the book of Psalms, for example, begins in the same way: “Blessed is ...” (Ps 1:1). The Beatitudes proclaim how to be fortunate, blessed. In this sense, they are at the heart of human desires, for “we all want to be happy. No one in the whole human race would deny that he wants to be happy, even if he is not sure what to be happy means” (St Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae*, 1, 3, 4). But Christ gives them an eschatological meaning, that is, one leading to eternal salvation: if people live in the way he describes, they will find the door of heaven open to them. God is not indifferent to us; he is active in our interest: he will console his followers, will meet their needs, will call them his sons and daughters, etc. The Beatitudes are a map of the route to human happiness, and one reason they are such a good one is that they express the dual desire that God has written on the human heart—to attain true happiness on earth and eternal bliss.

St Matthew records nine beatitudes: the first eight deal with the attitudes of the Christian towards the world (vv. 3–10); but the ninth, which begins “Blessed are you”, not “Blessed are those”, refers to those who suffer on Christ’s

account. This last beatitude is followed by a call to joy: suffering for Christ is a sign that a person has chosen the right road. In St Luke’s text (see Lk 6:20–26 and note), this aspect is given even more emphasis.

The Beatitudes have been much commented on in the Church’s catechesis. The first (v. 3) and the eighth (v. 10) mention the reward of the Kingdom of heaven. The first proclaims the blessedness of “the poor in spirit”. In the Old Testament poverty was seen not just as a material condition; it had religious value (cf. Zeph 2:3ff): those are poor who turn to God, not relying on their own merits but realizing that they are sinners in need of God’s help. They live temperate and austere lives, not only because of their material circumstances, but because they wish to accept and live in a humble condition, freely and generously. The eighth Beatitude describes as blessed those “who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake”. In the Bible, righteousness (justice) has a wider, more religious, meaning than it does in a legal-moral context. “In Hebrew a just man means a good and faithful servant of God, someone who fulfils the divine will (cf. Gen 7:1; 18:23–32; Ezek 18:5ff; Prov 12:10), or who is honourable and charitable towards his neighbour (cf. Tob 7:6; 9:6). So a just man is someone who loves God and proves his love by keeping God’s commandments and directing his whole life towards the service of his brothers, his fellow men” (St Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 40). This linking of the search for justice to the experience of persecution may imply that this Beatitude “fulfils the other beatitudes in a perfect way: the man who lives according to the beatitudes even when he is persecuted for his

<sup>10</sup>“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

1 Pet 3:14; 4:14  
Acts 5:41

<sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

<sup>12</sup>“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Mt 23:30  
Heb 11:32–38  
Jas 5:10

**Salt of the earth and light of the world**

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

Mk 9:50

rum. <sup>11</sup>Beati estis cum maledixerint vobis et persecuti vos fuerint et dixerint omne malum adversum vos, mentientes, propter me. <sup>12</sup>Gaudete et exsultate, quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in caelis; sic enim persecuti sunt prophetas, qui fuerunt ante vos. <sup>13</sup>Vos estis sal terrae; quod si sal evanuerit, in quo salietur? Ad nihilum valet ultra, nisi ut mittatur foras et conculcetur ab hominibus. <sup>14</sup>Vos estis lux mundi. Non potest civitas

convictions will be blessed” (St Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium Matthaei*, ad loc.).

Two Beatitudes, the second and the fourth (vv. 4, 6), promise the reward in the passive voice: it is God who will comfort and satisfy them. “Those who mourn” are people who suffer some sort of affliction, and especially those who grieve over offences committed against God by themselves or by others. Those who “hunger and thirst” are people who sincerely try to do the will of God, which they can discern from the commandments, from the duties that their state in life involves, and from their inner union with God: they are, in other words, those who seek holiness. Significantly, the reward comes from God, for only he can truly console us and only he can make us saints.

“The meek” (v. 5) are those who, imitating Christ (see 11:25–30 and 12:15–21), remain serene, humble and steadfast in adversity, and do not give in to bitterness or discouragement: “Adopted as true sons of God, we are made in the likeness of our Creator. We do not reflect the power of his image, because that power is his alone; we are like him in innocence, simplicity, meekness, patience, mercy and peace, in the virtues for which our Lord deigned to become one of us and to be like us” (St Peter Chrysologus, *Sermones*, 117). “The merciful” (v. 7) are those who show understanding of the defects and needs of others, overlooking faults and rendering what help they can. The parable of the unforgiving servant (18:23–35), particularly the words of the king (18:32–33), is the best commentary on this Beatitude.

“They shall see God” (v. 8) refers not just to ultimate happiness in heaven. In the language of the Old Testament it means, rather, having a close relationship with God, sharing in his decisions, the way a king’s counsellors help him to govern. This is what the virtue of purity enables us to do: “[It] is the precondition of the vision of God. Even now it enables us to see according to God, to accept others as ‘neighbours’; it lets us perceive the human body—ours and our neighbour’s—as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2519).

The “peacemakers” (v. 9) are those who foster peace in themselves and among others, and, as a basis for that, try to be reconciled with God and to help others to be so: “Peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly. Moreover, since the human will is unsteady and wounded by sin, the achievement of peace requires a constant mastering of passions and the vigilance of lawful authority. But this is not enough. [...] Peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 78).

**5:13–16** Salt and light are good images for describing those who practise the Beatitudes, that is, those who are disciples of Jesus, and they show the importance of good works (v. 16). Everyone needs to strive for personal holiness—and for the holiness of others. Jesus uses these two images to illustrate his message.