

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, JAN. 23, 2005
(3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time)
(Isa 8:23-9:3; Ps 27; 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17; Matt 4:12-17/23)

by Dr. Emilio G. Chávez,
St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach, Florida

Jesus was from Galilee, in the northernmost part of Israel, even farther north than Samaria. It was a place traditionally pagan, “Gentile” (from the Latin *gentes*, “peoples,” the translation of the Hebrew *goyim*, “nations” other than Israel). “Galilee” comes from the Hebrew *gelil haggoyim*, which is found in today’s first reading, translated “the district (literally “circle”) of the Gentiles.” It is not very clear how Jewish Galilee was; perhaps only a minority of its population was Jewish at the time of Jesus. It was surrounded by Gentiles.

Matthew sees the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in the fact that Jesus went to live and preach in Galilee, spending lots of time near the sea (Peter’s house in Capernaum was near the synagogue and waterfront property!). Isaiah announced a reversal of fortune for the land of the north, which had been overrun by Assyria *ca.* 733 B.C.E. (see 2 Kgs 15:29). “In the end” those lands will be glorified, and the people who dwelt in darkness will see a great light. Their humiliation will end and they will rejoice. Remember that Jesus is viewed as the Servant of Isa 49:6 who is a light to the Gentiles, that is, he brings God’s salvation to them, Luke 2:29-32.

The first reading is followed in Isaiah by a Messianic prophecy omitted here but read at midnight Mass on Christmas. It speaks of a child who is born, a kingly descendant of David who will rule the world in justice and peace; among his titles is in fact “Prince of Peace.” It is not clear exactly who Isaiah refers to, historically. Two contenders are the good reformer kings Hezekiah (about 700 B.C.E.) and Josiah (640-609 B.C.E.). But it is Jesus who announces and brings the Kingdom of God. Thus the first disciples heed his summons, and immediately leave all and follow him. They experience in Jesus the light of salvation of which the psalm speaks, along with the prophet Isaiah.