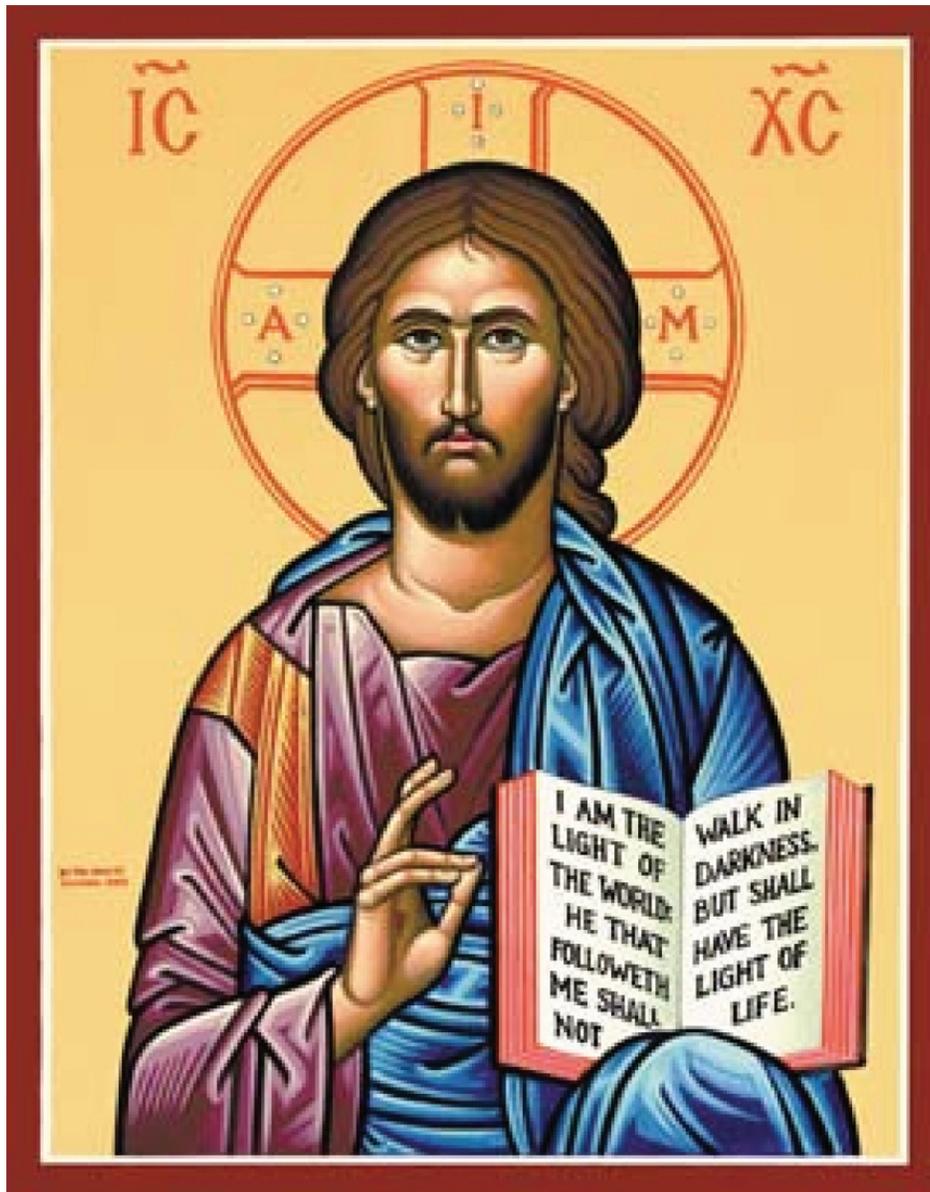


Life of Christ

A Study of the Four Gospels



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By **Pastor Edward F. Markquart**
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Des Moines, Washington, USA

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Session 2

Introduction

- *Prayer*
- *Questions from last week's session*

Each week, people will have questions they think of during the class. The class will begin by addressing the questions people have asked from the last session. Please have people write down their questions for this session on the sheet of paper on their table so they can be addressed next week.

Students will appreciate this process. After several weeks, the questions will become fewer. At the beginning of the course, there will be more questions.

- *Finish sections of the lesson not completed last week*

The instructor does not have to finish the entire lesson but can modify, adapt and alter it.

Principles of Interpretation

- This week, we will examine the principles of Biblical interpretation that influence this course.
- Every person who reads the Bible (or anything else) always is wearing a set of colored glasses that affects one's reading. These colored lenses are one's intellectual values, cultural prejudices, and the ideas and ideals of one's primary sub-group.
- For example, "mainline" Christians may read the same passage in the Bible differently than "fundamentalist" Christians.
- Roman Catholics may read certain passages of the New Testament differently than Protestants.
- "Reformed Jews" may read the Old Testament differently than "Orthodox Jews."
- Modern Muslims will read their sacred Scriptures differently than radical Muslims.

- Education, gender, age, income, life experiences, and other factors color our reading of the Bible.
- Each one of us belongs to groups or sub-cultures, and these groups affect the way that we study the Bible.

This class will have more power points than other classes, simply because we need to articulate the primary values which influence our study of the four gospels.

Values of the instructor that shape this course

It is important to know the core values and deeply held principles that guide an instructor.

- I believe in Christ.
- I believe that Christ is the Son of God, the Incarnation, the Mind/Heart of God.
- I believe in the divinity and humanity of Christ.
- I believe in the Bible as the Word of God.
- I believe that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God for us.
- I believe in the virgin birth, teachings, miracles, parables, death, and resurrection.
- I believe in the gifts of God's forgiveness, new birth, life, and eternal life.
- I believe in the reliability of the Bible.
- I believe in the reliability of the faithful transmission of the text of the Bible.
- I believe that we cannot prove God's existence, Christ's divinity, or eternal life.
- I believe that only God is the judge of each human heart and who is saved or not.
- I believe that divine love always trumps human knowledge.
- I am not a literalist.
- I am not a fundamentalist.
- I do not use the Bible to "politely" attack or clobber certain groups of people.
- Those groups may be of Jewish ancestry, people in interracial marriages, people with HIV-AIDs, divorcees, scientists and scientific positions, gays, lesbians, Arabs, Muslims, etc.

(Please, remember the instructor may revise any observations/values that are found in this course so each lesson becomes an honest adaptation to the values and beliefs of the teacher.

Also remember that any material highlighted in yellow will be shown as a power point during class.)

Purposes of this course

- Encounter the living Christ, the living Message, the living Word of God. God's Word has feet to run after us, hands to grab hold of us, and a voice to speak to our inner hearts. We want to encounter God's message for us through the particular Bible passages we are reading. We pray that God will speak to our individual lives and give us wisdom, power and strength through the Biblical words that we read.
- Encounter the intricacies and emphases of each individual gospel. Studying the four gospels carefully is like closely examining a Beverly Doolittle painting of Appaloosa horses. Those spotted horses are subtly hidden behind snowy birch trees in a winter woods. You need to look carefully and closely at the detail...in both the Beverly Doolittle paintings and in the four gospel parallels.
- Encounter one another during our class discussions. One of the most important functions of a congregation is

for people to get to know one another. People remain part of a group if others in that group know them, talk to them, enjoy them, and miss them when they are absent. The Bible calls this “koinonia.” We simply call it fellowship or learning to know, love and care for one another.



Discussion question:

What do you want to get out of this course?

The “discussion question” is always an opportunity to share with others in the small group of 3-5 people around a table. This course will have two-four discussion questions per session.

After this discussion, ask for general feedback from the various groups in the class on the topic.

What do you want to get out of this course? Some answers from another class.

- A deeper walk with God/Christ.
- A deeper sense of personal spirituality.
- A deeper understanding and appreciation of the gospels.
- A greater self-confidence in my knowledge of the Scriptures.
- A greater discipline for daily reading of the gospels.
- A more effective way of applying the gospels to my daily life.
- A competent Bible teacher to help me with my study of the gospels.
- A greater knowledge of the differences of the four gospels.

A simple outline of the life of Christ

- *Introduction:* The Birth, Baptism, Temptation, Call of the First Disciples
- *Galilee:* Narratives, Teachings, Miracles, Parables
- *Jerusalem:* Passion and Resurrection Narratives

Primary conclusions derived from the birth stories

Examine pages 1-11 in the text, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. Grab pages 1-11 with your fingers. These stories will be the focus for the next three lessons.

Examine p. 6 of the handout. In particular, examine the Daily Gospel Readings for Session 3 and Session 4. These readings will be our homework for the next two weeks.

As you read through the Birth Stories, you will find:

- Jesus was/is the Son of God
 - All four Gospels are clear: Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
 - All the following stories converge on one theme: Jesus is God’s Son.
 - Jesus was born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit was his Father.
 - In the temple, at age twelve, Jesus said, “I must be in my Father’s house.”

- His names reveal his identity: Son of the Most High, Emmanuel, Jesus.
- Jesus is named Son of God in Mark 1:1.
- The wise men came and worshipped him as the King.
- The shepherds heard the angels sing of his divinity: Savior, Christ, Lord.
- Simeon and Anna waited for this special moment of divine history.
- *All the birth stories add up to one primary conclusion: Jesus is the Son of God.*

- John the Baptist was a true prophet.

- John was the first genuine prophet in Israel in four hundred years.
- John's birth was unusual and miraculous.
- John turned the hearts of the people toward God and God's ways.
- John prepared the people's hearts for the coming of the Messiah.

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was fully human and born in human poverty.

- His parents gave an offering of the poor: two turtledoves and pigeons
- Jesus was born in a manger, a feeding trough for animals.
- There was no room for him in the inn.
- Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, Mary and Joseph were poor.
- The shepherds were poor people and outcasts.

- We know that Jesus' birth is reliably fixed in human history.

- We know that King Herod died in the year 4 BCE. This is a historical fact. The date of Jesus' birth is determined by the dating of Herod's death. Also, Herod had a murderous trait e.g. he killed his wife, his mother, his three sons. He killed people who threatened his throne and he killed many members of the Jewish Senate on the day of his own death. These are all historical facts. These facts are consistent with a personality who ordered the deaths of boys two years and younger.

- We know that Quirinius officially became governor of Syria in ruled in 10-7 BCE.

- We know that censuses were taken every fourteen years from 20 BCE-270 CE.

- Censuses were taken for military reasons and taxation. Roman law forbade the Jews to serve in the military but they could be taxed. Therefore the Jews were part of the census.

- There was an unusual conjunction of planets in the year 7 BCE when the movement of the planets Jupiter (the king planet) and Saturn (the protector of Israel) intersected with each other, causing a bright light of one planet intersecting with another bright light of the second planet. This trajectory occurs every 800 years and is often seen in planetariums at Christmas time.

- Many scholars determine the date of Jesus' birth from 7-4 BCE. If King Herod died in 4 BCE, then Jesus was born before that date. The unusual conjunction of the planets was in 7 BCE. 7-4 BCE is the period of time in which Jesus was born. Examine the websites at the conclusion of this lesson for further details.

Other conclusions derived from the birth stories

As you read the birth stories about Jesus, you will discover other themes that are emphasized:

- **True faith.** Mary, the mother of Jesus, trusted the promise of the angel Gabriel and became a model of true faith. Faith is believing in Christ and believing the promises of God through Christ. We contemporary Christians are also invited to have true faith; that is, to trust Christ and the promises of God through Christ.
- **“Filled with the Holy Spirit.”** Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon and Jesus were “filled with the Holy Spirit”. The same fullness of the Spirit happened often to Christians in Luke’s Book of Acts, and Luke wants us contemporary Christians to be filled with the Spirit also.
- **“Joy.”** In these stories, there are many expressions of inordinate joy and praise of God. We Christians are to be filled with similar joy, praise and happiness. There are three hymns of joy in Luke: The Magnificat, The Benedictus, The Nunc Dimittus.
- **God is Lord; Jesus is Lord; God and Jesus are to be our Lord, the Ruler of our lives.** We Christians are called to believe in both God as our Lord and Christ as our Lord. We hear a crescendo that Jesus is called Lord. That crescendo reaches a climax in Luke 2:11, when we hear about the birth of Christ “our Lord.” This movement (“Jesus is Lord”) grows and crescendos . . . from knowing that God is our Lord to finally realizing that *Jesus* is our Lord. A contemporary Christian is invited to know the Lordship of both God and Jesus.
- **Memorable Bible verses.** Throughout this course, you will discover “golden nuggets” from the gospels. These “golden nuggets” are Bible verses or Bible phrases that speak deeply to your life. For example, in the infancy stories, you will find:
 - “With God, nothing is impossible.” Luke 1:37. Page 3 in the text.
 - “Do not be afraid, (own name), for you have found favor with God.” Luke 1:30

My Spiritual Diary, Notes, Page 363

Find the page titled, Notes. It is page number 363. (This page has no page number.)

Under the word, Notes, write the words: “My Spiritual Diary.”

Whenever you see a specific Bible verse or Biblical phrase that personally speaks to you, highlight it and copy that verse here in this section, “My Spiritual Diary.”

To begin with, please copy the following verses onto this page:

- “With God, nothing is impossible.” Luke 1:37.
- “Do not be afraid, (own name), for you have found favor with God.” Luke 1:30

Attempt to memorize some of these favorite verses and where they are found in the Bible e.g. Luke 1:37, “With God, nothing is impossible.”

Examination of The Prologue in *The Synopsis* (see page 1)

#1. Prologue

Notice the four columns.

Notice the titles of the four gospels e.g. *According to Matthew, According to Mark, According to Luke, According to John*. These titles were not part of the earliest Greek manuscripts of the four gospels. In other words, there were no titles ascribing authorship to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

A. The Gospel According to Matthew

-An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. In the next Bible verses, Matthew will trace the family tree of Jesus back to the greatest patriarch of the Jewish faith: Father Abraham. Matthew, consistent with his Jewish disposition, identified Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. All Jewish people knew of the Messiah who had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus was from the tribal lineage of King David and could trace his roots back to Father Abraham.

The following are introductory comments about the Gospel of Matthew:

- We know that the Gospel of Mathew is heavily dependent on the Gospel of Mark and copies 90% of Mark's Gospel.
- Matthew is a *Jewish gospel*. It was written to and for Jewish people of that era.
- Matthew uses *common Jewish words*: Genealogy, Christ, David, Abraham.
- As we study further chapters in the book of Matthew, we will discover *other common Jewish idioms and phrases*. We will hear the Gospel of Matthew use Jewish "lingo" e.g. "rabbi," "verily," "gnash their teeth," "the fulfillment of Scripture," and "the kingdom of heaven."

In Matthew's gospel, we will see Jesus as the New Moses, the New Teacher. He will give his most famous teachings on The Mountain. We call those teachings, the Sermon on the Mount. (In Luke's gospel, those famous teachings are given on the plain and are called the Sermon on the Plain.)

- *Ireneas*, Church Father, 180 CE, says that Matthew wrote in the "Hebrew tongue." "Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, [and laying the foundations of the Church.](#)"
- Many Biblical scholars believe that *Matthew was addressing a Jewish community* of Christians with their Jewish logic, their Jewish rationales, their Jewish way of thinking. He wrote to persuade Jewish minds that Jesus was none other than the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. At the conclusion of one of Matthew's resurrection stories, we will hear the words, "And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day." (Matthew 28:15, p. 329). There is a logic or sense of reasoning in all four gospels, including the Gospel of Matthew.
- We will start building *a contemporary analogy*. That is, let us imagine that this particular author is a Jewish rabbi/businessman who heard about Jesus from eyewitnesses and then recorded his observations, conclusions for Jewish people who are living in New York City.
- *Both the uniqueness of the author and uniqueness of the audience* will shape how the message is heard and recorded.

B. The Gospel According to Mark

-The beginning of the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The following are introductory comments about the Gospel of Mark:

- Gospel = good news. Mark gives us the word, "gospel," and that word becomes the title of each book, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Son of God is his highest title. At the beginning of Mark's gospel, we hear that Jesus is "the Son of God." At the end of Mark's gospel, we will hear the centurion declare that "Truly this man

was the Son of God.” These phrases are bookends of the Gospel of Mark; they hold the book together. “Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” These bookends are found at the very beginning and very ending of his gospel.

- There are no infancy stories in Mark, nor in Paul nor John. There are five primary authors of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul), but only two of them tell infancy stories about Jesus. In Mark, we go directly from the opening statement in Mark 1:1 to the adult life of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- Either Mark did not know of the infancy stories or they were not important to him.
- Mark is the shortest of the gospels.
- It is reported to us by a Church Father that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul.
- “As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out.” Clement of Alexandria, fragment in Eusebius Church History, VI:14,6 (C.E. 190), in NPNF2,I:261
- The Gospel of Mark could be entitled, “The Gospel of Peter.” Before Simon Peter was martyred in Rome, Peter told Jesus’ story to John Mark who recorded it for posterity and us.
- The Gospel of Mark was written during the time of the persecutions under Nero. We will study this persecution later.
- In our *contemporary* analogy, this author is equivalent to a local fisherman, perhaps from Ballard, Washington or other notable fishing village. He records his “down to earth” observations and conclusions about Jesus for other fishermen and farmers living in a small towns throughout his agrarian world. His message is direct and simple: he often uses words such as “any” and “immediately.” He writes with a sense of urgency. He likes stories about fishing and farming.
- Turn to page 12 in *The Synopsis* and see that Mark continues with Mark 1:2. In other words, Mark has no infancy stories about Jesus’ birth and childhood.
- Gradually, over time, you will learn how to use this basic textbook, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. This book is not laid out like your Bible, with the gospels in consecutive order e.g. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Rather, this textbook has laid out the chronology of the four gospels according to an “incident” or “event” in Jesus’ life. For example, here in the early childhood of Jesus, Matthew and Luke report to us the incidents and events from Jesus’ childhood but the Mark and John do not.

C. The Gospel According to Luke

The following are introductory comments about the Gospel of Luke:

- Luke wanted to set his Jesus Story within the history of the Roman Empire. He was a “history buff” who wanted to give us facts and figures about the kings and other officials.
- Luke is also the author of the book of Acts. The two books compose 25% of the New Testament. Luke/Acts is longer than all the combined epistles of Paul. It is the longest book in our New Testament.
- Luke was a traveling companion of Paul and was with him when Paul was in prison for two years at the close of his ministry in Rome.
- Scholars tell us that the book of Luke has the best Greek in the New Testament.
- Luke was a physician. (Col. 4:14, 2 Tim. 4:11, Philemon 24)
- In Luke 1:1, Luke tells us that there were “*many* other narratives” about Christ. He could be referring to Mark, Quella (a document of 200 Bible verses common to Matthew and Luke), and Matthew. Or he could be refer-

ring to the other gospels that did not get into our New Testament e.g. the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter.

- The narrative that Luke created was based on “other apostle’s eyewitness” accounts. Luke’s narrative has apostolic authority; that is, his stories were based on eyewitness of other apostles. Luke does not claim that he was a first-hand eyewitness but he reported what other eyewitnesses told him.
- These eyewitnesses were also “ministers of the word.” That means, they were caretakers of the word, stewards of the gospel. One of the most important responsibilities of a pastor is to be a caretaker of the gospel. It would be somewhat like adopting a child and becoming a caretaker of that child for your life.
- Luke had “followed all things *closely* for some time.” He had been fascinated with Jesus for a long time, and it seemed appropriate for him to write a record of his observations.
- Luke wanted to write “an orderly account.” He wants to set the story straight. There will be a logical progression to his story.
- Luke was writing “to Theophilus.” Theophilus is a Greek word and Luke was writing to Greeks and not Jews. In contrast to the Jewish Gospel of Matthew, the reader of the Gospel of Luke will repeatedly discover the Greek translation for Jewish words e.g. using the Greek word, ‘master,’ instead of the Jewish word, ‘rabbi,’ and ‘truly’ instead of the word ‘verily.’
- In the Greek language, “Theo” means “God” and “philos” means “lover.” The Greek name, Theophilus, means “lover of God.” In other words, Luke was specifically writing to a Greco-Roman official but he also was writing to a Greek/Roman audience whom he assumed was open to receive this message. The words, thought patterns and logic would appeal to a person who talked like a Greek, thought like a Greek, and reasoned like a Greek. We recall that the Roman world wanted to act and think “Greek.” Think of all the Greek classical marble statues that were recovered during this epoch and brought to Rome. In the introduction to Luke’s gospel, Theophilus was called “most excellent” and most scholars think that this title implied that he was a Roman official.
- Luke wanted Theophilus to know the truth about which he had already heard. We are often in the same position as Theophilus. We have heard about Jesus and the stories of Jesus, but we want to hear the stories more accurately and systematically. Based on this more comprehensive knowledge of the life of Christ, we want to reach conclusions. We want to know a greater truth about Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, we are like Theophilus.
- In our *contemporary* analogy, Luke is to be compared to a physician/turned historian/turned TV reporter, and he writes his commentary for CNN International News.
- He is intending that these stories about Jesus reach a broad, world-wide audience.

-Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, Luke reports to us that there are many other accounts of the life of Jesus that have been written down. Luke could be referring to the gospels of Mark, Matthew, Peter, Thomas and others.

-Just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, Luke does not claim to be an eyewitness but is handing down the accounts of other eyewitnesses who are servants of the word. Jesus himself was also known as “the Word.”

Pastors are called to be servants or caretakers of the Word. Throughout the centuries, pastors have this specific responsibility to care for the Bible. The Bible is entrusted to the larger Church; and within the larger Church, one role of a pastor is to be a teacher of the Word and to pass that Word onto the next generation.

-I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, Luke has decided that he too will write an orderly account. Luke informs us that he has investigated the life of Jesus very carefully and now he wants to write an orderly account to the “most excellent Theophilus.” Remember Luke addresses him as “most excellent” suggesting that Theophilus was a Roman official.

-So that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Theophilus has already received some instruction about Jesus of Nazareth and Luke wants him to know more of the truth about this Jesus.

That is one of the primary reasons that we are taking this course. As much as humanly possible, we want to know the truth about Jesus.

D. The Gospel According to John

The following are introductory comments about the Gospel of John:

- We will discover that the book of John is very different than the first three gospels. One of the purposes of this class will be to explore the differences between John and the first three gospels.
- We need to learn to accept the differences and contrasts between John and the first three gospels (which are called “the Synoptics.”). We need to stop trying to reconcile these differences e.g. the placement of the call of the first disciples, the cleansing of the temple, and what happened at the Last Supper.
- We will discover that the Gospel of John is highly philosophical. John will use philosophical categories like “the Logos, life and light.”
- We will discover that the Gospel of John uses extended, involved speeches. Jesus will not use down to earth parables and down to earth, short, pithy moral teachings as in the first three gospels but will give us long, philosophical discourses.
- We will discover that the Gospel of John was written by an eyewitness who actually “hung out” with Jesus and closely watched his every move. We will be surprised at the numerous pithy little details from historical situations that the Apostle John will tell us. We will discover that the Apostle John is our “reporter on the scene.” He reports eyewitness coverage that could only be seen by someone who “had been there.”
- In our *contemporary* analogy, John is to be compared to a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, and he is writing for deep thinkers, university students and professors all over the world. Even though the Apostle John is highly philosophical, he is also the best eyewitness of the events of the life of Jesus, along with Simon Peter who was the source of the Gospel of Mark.

-In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John’s Gospel is more philosophical. In the first five verses, there is no reference to Jesus of Nazareth, but to the Word. In Greek, the Word is “logos” from which we receive our word, “logic.” So the translation could have read, “In the beginning was the Logic, and the Logic was with God and the Logic was God.” “All things were made in the beginning through this Logic.” The Logic was a personal pronoun; that is, the Logic was a “he” in the next Biblical sentence.

The Logic was life and light.

Yes, from the get-go, John’s gospel is much more philosophical.

-He was in the beginning with God. Jesus existed in the beginning, before the universe and time came into being. In the Gospel of John, we will hear much more about the “pre-existence” of Jesus; that Jesus existed before Father Abraham. From the opening verse of John’s gospel, the reader is to understand that Jesus was and is fully God.

-All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. The Word (the Logic of God, the Mind of God, the Intelligence of God) was the designer and creator of the entire universe. We hear similar themes in the Book of Colossians 1:14-16: “He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

-What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The Gospel of

John is highly philosophical. John uses philosophical categories of his day such as “life” and “light.” In the Gospel of John, the word, “life,” is used 36 times and the word, “light,” is used 22 times. Similarly, light is contrasted with darkness. These philosophical and theological categories were familiar to the thought patterns of the Stoics and Hellenists of the day. Yet there is evidence that John also knew the Old Testament and Jewish thought.

In the first three gospels, the word, “kingdom,” is used 113 times but in the Gospel of John, the word, “kingdom,” is used only twice. Think about that for a moment: the primary teaching in the first three gospels, “the kingdom,” is used only twice in the Gospel of John. In John, the concept of “life” replaces the concept of “the kingdom.”

The Gospel of John uses different thought categories than the first three gospels.

-The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. Jesus will shine in the dark world. Darkness could not overcome Jesus. This is a word of hope. Underline it. Circle it. Write this verse on the memory page 362. Near the word “did,” write the word, “can.” The darkness can not overcome the light. In our depression and wanting to give up, we are reminded that God’s light will never be snuffed out from the world.

-There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. Underline the phrase, “sent from God.” John repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus was “sent from God.” We will hear that the word, “apostles,” means to be “sent” and Christians are to be “sent from God into the world.”

-He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. Circle the word, “believe.” Write near that circled word, “the first time.” This is the first of 57 times that the Apostle John will use his favorite word, “believe.” He consistently writes: “These are written that you may believe...” As we move into the Gospel of John, we will hear that what John wants is to believe in Jesus Christ more than anything else.

-He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. John the Baptist was not the light but pointed to the light. We are the same: we point to the greatest light in the whole world, Jesus Christ.

-The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. Circle the word, “true.” We are going to find out that Jesus was/is the true light that beckons for people in the world to follow him. There are thousands of other lights beckoning for the human race to follow, but only Christ is the true light, the true beacon, the true radiance who guides our life in the ways of the Lord God.

-He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. In this gospel, we will repeatedly hear that “the world” did not know Christ and did not follow him. The word, “world,” is a symbolic word, and symbolizes all who do not follow the light of God in Christ.

-He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. The Gospel of John will lay out the basic tragedy in Jesus’ life: his *own* people did not follow him. And that theme is still true today.

-But to all who received him, who believed in his name, Circle the word, “receive.” What is it to receive Christ? It is to believe in his name. To believe in his name means to believe in his powerful Presence. As we move into this course, we will gradually discover what the word, “believe,” means to the John. Circle the word, “believe,” and remember that this is the purpose of the Gospel of John: to persuade each of us to believe in Christ.

-He gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. Jesus gives us the power to become children of God. Who are the children of God? The children of God are those people who believe in his name.

People are children of God not because of blood or inheritance or nationality or belonging to a religious group.

People are children of God not because of the “will power” within their psyche. We humans do not will to become children of God. Becoming children of God is *not* a result of will power.

People become children of God because they/we are born of God. Just like a person’s biological birth is not the result of will power but is purely a gift from our parents, so also our rebirth is not the result of will power within but is purely a gift from God. We will hear about this during the story of Nicodemus in John 3 and his

being “born again” and” born from above.”

-And the Word became flesh and lived among us, The Logic of God became flesh; the Word became a human being. Jesus was God in the flesh.

The word, “incarnation,” means “in the flesh.”

The Logic/the Word “lived” among us. The word, “lived” means he “tented” among us or “tabernacled” among us or “camped” among us. Jesus was the flesh of God and he lived among us, down here on Earth, within a human body. That is what this story from the Apostle John is all about: God coming down to Earth and living in the human body and the human mind of Jesus. God came and lived within a human being.

No other religion in the world espouses this basic truth: the reality of the eternal invisible, immortal God became an actual, real human being on Earth. The Living God chose to be “camped out” in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This fundamental truth is what distinguishes Christianity from other world religions.

-And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. Circle the word, “we.” The word, “we,” refers to the Apostle John and all who witnessed the life of Jesus on earth. We recall that John is our “eyewitness on the scene” who will report to us the details of Jesus’ life. This is his first use of the personal pronoun, “we.” In the study of the Gospel of John, be prepared to be amazed at the many historical details in events from Jesus’ life, told either by a clever fabricator of minutia from Jesus’ life or told by an authentic eyewitness who was present as Jesus’ story unfolded.

“Glory” refers to the glorious radiant presence of God in Jesus. In the Old Testament, the Jews saw God’s glorious radiant presence in the pillar of fire by night and now they could see God’s glorious presence in the life of Jesus.

Jesus was the Father’s only son. The Greek word for “only” is “monogenesis,” which means mono-genetic Son of God. All the rest of us are the “adopted” children of God. God has only one, “mono-genesis,” Son and that was/is Jesus.

Jesus was full of grace and truth. Circle the three words, “full,” “grace” and “truth.” “Full” means like a cargo ship was full to the brim with cargo. “Grace” means free gift of love. “Truth” means that Jesus was full of the reality and authenticity of God.

To summarize: Each of the four gospels related more effectively to different sets of people. For example, the Gospel of Matthew related better to Jewish people with Jewish language and Jewish thought patterns.

- The Gospel of Mark is equivalent to a local fisherman, perhaps from Ballard, Washington or other notable fishing village. He records his “down to earth” observations and conclusions about Jesus for other fishermen and farmers living in a small towns throughout his agrarian world.
- The Gospel of Luke related to non-Jewish people called Gentiles. As the Christian religion spread away from its geographic basis in Israel, new vocabulary and new thought patterns were needed. The Gospel of Luke adapted its message to the language of non-Jewish people.
- Meanwhile, the Gospel of John was much more philosophical. The philosophy of Hellenism was in vogue, and so the language of Hellenism (Logic, light, life) was employed in order to tell the story of Jesus to another set of people.
- In the Jewish Gospel of Matthew, the central category is the “kingdom” which was familiar to the Jewish race of people. In the Gospel of John, the kingdom of God is mentioned only twice; rather, in John, we hear about finding “life” and finding “life abundantly.” Matthew’s “kingdom of heaven” spoke primarily to Jewish people. John’s “life” spoke to non-Jewish people who were Greek speaking and thinking.
- There are four distinct authors and four distinct audiences. Each of the four gospels tells the story of Jesus in a different and distinct way. By analogy, it would be like four different and distinct people closely watching the election of the President of the USA. Each person would see the event differently and report that event from his or her own distinct point of view with his or her own distinct vocabulary. So it is with our four gospels.

They are four distinct interpretations of the *same* event. The four gospels have their similarities, their differences, and each has their own uniqueness.

We need to create a contemporary analogy. Four different authors are involved with the events. They then report their stories to four different audiences.

- The first and earliest reporter is a fisherman from Ballard, Washington, who reports simply to other fishermen what he heard about Jesus. (Mark)
- The second reporter is a Jewish rabbi/businessman who reports the story of Jesus to his fellow Jews living in New York. (Matthew)
- The third reporter is a physician and history buff who has become a TV commentator who reports the story through CNN World News to the world-wide community. (Luke)
- The fourth reporter is a university professor who teaches philosophy at the University of Chicago. He reports his observations to deep thinkers, students and faculties of all colleges and universities around the globe. (John)

So we have different reports from four different people who addressed four different audiences with different needs.

There are different theories of inspiration of the Bible. Some theories of inspiration want four identical messages in four gospels, so in all four gospels, the authors will report identical stories. But that is not the way it happens in the Bible. Our theories of Biblical inspiration are helped when we comprehend and appreciate the differences and uniqueness of each author and audience. The diversity of authors and diversity of audiences helps us appreciate the various nuances of the Biblical message.



Discussion question:

What is your favorite story from Jesus' childhood and why do you like it so much?

This is a time to gather as a small group of 3-5 people and share. Have the groups last about 10-12 minutes, depending on the size and energy of the group. Try to keep the small group together for the first seven sessions and then the groups will experience “musical chairs” and everyone will be in a new group.

Abbreviations for dating events

- For dating of events, we need useful abbreviations:
- Scholars no longer use BC (before Christ) and AD (in the year of our Lord, not After Death.)
- Instead, scholars and commentators now use the following abbreviations:
- BCE: Before Common Era or Before Christian Era
- CE: Common Era or Christian Era
- Instead of the “old” way of BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Dominei, the Year of our Lord), now scholars are using the initials BCE and CE.
- During the remainder of this course, we will use the BCE and CE when discussing dates.
- These initials are clearer than BC or AD, especially since there was so much confusion about the initials AD. In numerous minds, many people translate the initials AD as “after death.”

The following is a *theoretical* time sequence for writing the gospels.

- Q or Quella was the earliest New Testament source, written about 40-50 CE. In the coming classes, we will study those Bible verses which are identical or almost identical in their parallel columns in Matthew and Luke. The assumption is that Matthew and Luke were copying from a common source called Q or Quella. Quella is a German word for “source.”
- Then Paul’s letters were written in about 48-62 CE.
- Then Mark or John Mark was written in about 65 CE. Simon Peter told his reminiscences to John Mark before Peter’s death in Rome. Mark is 661 Bible verses long. Mark does not use Q or any other apparent resources.
- Matthew and Luke were written in about 80 CE.
- Matthew consists of three parts: Mark, Q and M. Matthew is very Jewish in its outlook. Matthew reproduces/copies 91% of Mark. Plus Matthew adds Q and his Special M sections (Matthean sections that are found only in Matthew.) It may be that Matthew, the tax collector, was the final editor of the Gospel of Matthew who put together Mark, plus Q, plus M.
- Luke consists of three parts: Mark, Q and L. Luke is very “Gentile” in its outlook. Luke reproduces/copies about 48% of Mark plus Q and his Special L sections (Lucan sections that are found only in Luke.)
- As a general rule, Matthew follows Mark’s outline almost all the time. Luke follows Mark’s outline of Jesus’ life but not as faithfully as Matthew.
- John, an eyewitness, wrote in about the year 95 CE. John did not use Q, Mark, Matthew or Luke. John seems to be an independent gospel. John’s eyewitness accounts are filled with local flavor and juicy details.

The above comments are all theories and theological speculations. These theories may be interesting and helpful. However, these speculations are part of the minutia, part of the trivia, part of the unimportant theological details. Yet such theories will be helpful as we study the four gospels.

Did secular, non-Biblical authors refer to Jesus in their writings during the first century?

- **No.** That is, several famous authors, who wrote during the first century of the Christian era, did not refer to Jesus. This includes such first-century authors as Seneca, Pliny the Elder, Epictetus, Juvenal, Plutarch, and Philo.
- **Yes.** There are four references to Jesus in non-Biblical literature during the first century. The four references are from the writings of:
 - **Tacitus** (56-120 CE). This Roman historian gives the first non-Biblical reference to “Christ” and “Christians.” Tacitus suggests that Emperor Nero tried to place the blame on Christians for the burning of Rome. Tacitus wrote: “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.”
 - **Suetonius** (69-122) CE: “Chrestus.” He wrote the book, *Lives of the Emperors*, which was a history of the eleven Roman emperors. Suetonius wrote about Emperor Claudias (41-54 CE) who “banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus.” Chrestus =

Christ. Suetonius, writing about Emperor Nero, said “punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.”

• **Pliny the Younger** (61-113 CE): “hymn to Christ as to a god.” In his letter (112 CE) to Emperor Trajan, Pliny the Younger asked about prosecuting Christians who were “meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to do wicked deeds, never commit fraud, theft, adultery, not to lie nor to deny a trust. . .” This reference reveals several key facts: Jesus was worshipped as a god; Christians met on the first day of the week; the meeting occurred before sunrise; they sang songs to Christ; Christians were committed to holy behavior.

• **Josephus** (37-100 CE): “Jesus a wise man,” “tribe of Christians.” We will study Josephus in a later lesson when he colorfully describes the intricate relationship between Herod, John the Baptist, and Herodias (Lesson 16.) Josephus made one primary reference to Christ. The following words in **ALL CAPS** are likely additions or interpolations added by later Christian copyists over the centuries in an attempt to make Josephus support faith in Jesus as the Christ.

The highlighted “yellow” words are most likely Joseph’s original words:

Josephus “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man IF IT BE LAWFUL TO CALL HIM A MAN, for he was a doer of wonders, A TEACHER OF SUCH MEN AS RECEIVE THE TRUTH WITH PLEASURE. He drew many after him BOTH OF THE JEWS AND THE GENTILES. HE WAS THE CHRIST. When Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, FOR HE APPEARED TO THEM ALIVE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY, AS THE DIVINE PROPHETS HAD FORETOLD THESE AND THEN THOUSAND OTHER WONDERFUL THINGS ABOUT HIM, and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day (Antiquities 18:63-64).”



Discussion question:

What gets in your way of studying the Bible and/or reading the Bible devotionally each day? What can you do to change this within yourself?

• *Closing Prayers*

Assigned Readings for Session 3: Birth Stories

Day 1	# 1	Prologue
Day 2	#2	Promise of the Birth of John the Baptist
Day 3	#3	The Annunciation
Day 4	#4	Mary’s Visit to Elizabeth
Day 5	#5	The Birth of John the Baptist
Day 6	#6	The Genealogy of Jesus
Day 7		A Sabbath Rest

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