

The Gospel of Matthew

September 24, 2023

Opening Prayer

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Collect for Proper 28, BCP 236)

Bible Study Basics

The world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text.

Behind the Text in Matthew – Historical Context

(Most Bible scholars think ...)

- Matthew was written by a Jewish Christian
- The author of Matthew had access to the Gospel of Mark, another resource scholars call “Q,” and a third collection of oral or written stories about Jesus, known as “M material.”
- The intended audience was urban, Jewish, and relatively wealthy
- Timeframe: after Mark, after the fall of Jerusalem
- Written to provide guidance to the Christian church

Of the Text – Literary Markers

- The story is intended for reading aloud in community
- Matthew is the “teaching gospel,” includes five separate speeches given by Jesus. The overarching narrative is the primary focus, with speeches inserted into it.
- “Disciples” are the whole community of people following Jesus. Matthew specifies “the twelve disciples” or “the twelve” when he means only the 12. Peter has a distinct and symbolic role.
- Matthew simplifies stories found in Mark; doesn’t include as many details.
- Matthew focused on what Jesus **said**.

In Front of the Text – Our own context and experience

- Matthew comes first in the Bible; historically, it was prioritized.
- Often, Matthew’s version of a particular story is the one we know best or that sounds the most familiar.

Working with the Text – The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17 + 4:1)

Matt. 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Behind the Text

- John: proclaiming baptism of repentance + “brood of vipers”
- Jesus: Matthew’s Gospel provides a birth narrative. The reader/listener already knows who Jesus is.

Of the Text

- “Jesus came....to be baptized” Jesus planned this. Jesus is in charge.
- Jesus as teacher – dialogue with John
- Righteousness and fulfillment are key Matthean themes
- “the heavens were opened **to him**”
- “**This is my Son**”
- “to be tempted by the devil”

In front of the Text

- How does this text bring to light, challenge, broaden, or reinforce our working theological convictions? (Where is God? What does this text say about God?)
- How does this passage challenge and nurture the spiritual life? What spiritual practices are explicitly or implicitly suggested by the text?
- How does this text relate to contemporary social and political realities and ideologies?