

Lecture 4 –Themes in Matthew

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

Key Terms

Magi, New Adam

Objectives

- *To reflect on the birth accounts in the Gospels pertaining to Christ's humanity
- *To understand the meaning of the visit of the magi, the ministry of John the Baptizer, and the temptation of Christ

Lead Questions

- *Why is the historical reality of the incarnation so important?
- *Reflect on the depths of humility Jesus went through to become man—physical body, danger, temptation, etc.

Themes in Matthew

I. All Four Gospels Show Jesus' Nature

- A. Strong statements in Mark, Luke, John concerning the nature of Christ.
 1. Mark 1:1: Good news!
 2. Luke 1-2: Jesus' identity in 1:31-35, 1:77, 2:11, 2:30, 2:47.
 3. John 1-2: Trinitarian prologue (1:1-18), Son of God, King of Israel (1:49)
- B. Matthew's numerous understated remarks on Jesus' identity
 1. Genealogy of 1:1-17: Son of: David, Abraham, kings, sinful women and Gentiles.
 2. 1:18-2:12: Several titles, explicit information
 3. Immanuel, in light of Isa. 7-8
- C. Birth narratives link birth of Jesus of Nazareth to Old Testament (OT) prophecy.
 1. Matthew cites 5 prophecies in chapters 1-4 to show concern for the Jew and Gentile. The fulfillment motif in Matthew, especially chapters 1 to 4 shows interest in OT.
 - a. The birth of Jesus fulfills Immanuel prophecy (1:23 to Isa. 7:14).
 - b. His ministry fulfills the prophecy of light to the Gentiles (4:15-16 to Isa. 9:1-2).
 2. Luke - Genealogy going to Adam, plus the poem of praise from Simeon (2:30-31).
 3. Mark has reference to Isa. 40
 4. John alludes to OT prophecies and events: tabernacle, Law, lamb of God
- D. Birth narratives assert the historical reality of the incarnation
 1. Matthew and Luke take pains to locate Jesus' birth in real history. Luke most clear in identifying time and place (Luke 2:1). Luke 3:1-2 give several references to time period.
 2. When Herod determines to kill Jesus, His parents have to flee (Matt 2).
 3. He grows in wisdom and in stature, as any human would (Luke 2).

That which he has not assumed, he has not healed; but that which is united to His godhead, is also saved. Gregory of Nazianzus

II. The Magi and the Themes of Matthew 2

A. Context

B. Historical backgrounds

1. Herod, king of Israel, died 4 BC. Immensely gifted in youth, increasingly cruel and paranoid with age, bent on retaining power. Executed wife and three sons. To order the

execution of all male children in Bethlehem is consistent with portrait of his last days: cf. Josephus, Wars 1.6

2. Magi from east: Advisors to kings. Not 3 and not kings. Little information about their origin or knowledge. Possibly some knowledge of OT through Daniel. The star: God is condescending to their level of maturity to communicate with them. Stars were “portents.” These Gentiles had little knowledge, but they acted on it. They also traveled great distance, a difficult (camels), expensive journey. Consider: Herod killed all boys two and under.

C. Opening Action

1. Arrival in Jerusalem. Enough entourage to be noticed by Herod, esp. given their question.
2. They ask disturbing questions. Herod sees news of one “born king” as a threat.
3. All Jerusalem too—when Herod is unhappy, most anyone can be unhappy (Apron).
4. Questions priests (Saducees) and teachers (Pharisees) regarding place of birth. These groups hated each other; perhaps he called them in separately to avoid trickery. Formula is good theology: “Thus it was written through the prophet” (Micah 5:2) suggests the prophet is mouthpiece for God.
5. Does Herod believe the prophecies? No, yet felt threatened enough to plan to eliminate Jesus. Foolish. If report is false, why bother? If true, the attempt is futile.

D. Herod calls Magi.

1. Note verb *ἠκρίβωσεν* (*ekribosen*, “to ascertain, to find out”) in imperfect. Sense may be that of repeated questioning. Herod inquires carefully when the star appeared and sends them away, asking them to report back.
2. Herod takes message of “king of the Jews” politically. Jews expected Messiah soon. Magi’s message even fit prophecies for kings to come and pay homage; see Isa. 60:3; Jer. 23:5-6.
3. Yet the evidence that this is indeed the Messiah is weak. So they do nothing!

E. Magi to Jesus

1. 2:9-11 Star reappears and leads to house.
2. 2:12 “They worship” *προσκυνεω* (*proskuneo*, “to bow, to show obeisance”). No full Christology.
3. Gifts. “Gold for royalty, incense for deity and myrrh for burial” asks too much. Simply costly, grand gifts: gold (royal metal), frankincense and myrrh: costliest spices. Analogy....

F. Method for application: Figures are real but represent types of response to Jesus through ages

1. Herod an Antichrist, doing Satanic work. An anti-king.
2. Priests and scribes are also false leaders. They have knowledge but use it to serve Herod, not people. They quote Scripture beautifully, but never go and see the Christ themselves.
3. City of Jerusalem no better. Alarmed, but satisfied to quote Scripture and do nothing.
4. Magi: Knew very little, but acted on what they knew. Only Gentiles go and worship.
5. Reader faces a choice (common in Matthew). With whom do you side?

G. Using Matthew’s method today

1. Identify people’s response to Jesus in story for possible avenues of application.
2. The disciples, foes, and vacillators who encounter Jesus in the Gospel are somewhat like people everywhere. Their responses resemble responses people always give through the ages.

III. John the Baptizer Prepares the Way for Jesus’ Ministry (focus Luke 3)

A. Locating John

B. John’s message

1. Kingdom
2. Repentance and its qualities
 - a. Urgent - ax already at the root of the tree
 - b. Must be sincere - produce fruit in keeping with repentance
 - c. Decisive - repent and be baptized - washing symbolizes sorrow - a radical way of

saying you need to be cleansed.

C. John and Jesus

Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. He identified with His people even to the point of identifying with their sin.

IV. The Temptation: A Multi-Perspectival Reading

A. The reality of the temptation and the issues at hand

B. Exposition of three temptations

1. Food is temptation of material things at wrong time and place.
2. "Throw yourself down" is the temptation to know.
3. "Bow to me" is the raw confrontation, the pure appeal to power.

C. Anthropocentric reading: Jesus is the new Adam, the faithful man

Jesus, our model of true humanity, an example the redeemed can follow to limited degree.

In what ways should the church be echoing John the Baptist's message today? In what ways is his message irrelevant today?