

Sessions 4 & 5

The Opening Chapters of the Gospel: Mt 1-4

As we begin our journey with Matthew's gospel, we look at the Gospel's opening chapters, the story of Jesus' birth (Mt 1-2) and the first theological statements of Jesus' identity (Mt 3-4). These chapters introduce us to some of the themes that will recur throughout the rest of the gospel.

Video Sessions 4 & 5

As a result of these videos, you will:

- Locate Mt 1-4 within the overall schema of Matthew's gospel;
- Identify the key approaches, concerns and traditions upon which Matthew draws as evident in Mt 1-4;
- Be introduced to Matthew's portrait of Jesus (Christology).



Hieronymus Bosch, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1510.
(Photo: Michael Trainor, used with permission.)

Matthew's Gospel Chapters 1-4

- In Mt 1-2, the Gospel writer traces the origin of Jesus in his birth and infancy. The evangelist draws on unique and special material. Jesus' story parallels the ancient story of Israel.

SUMMARY Mt 1-2

- Mt presents Jesus as God's child and faithful child of Israel who mirrors the figure of the great leader, Moses.
- These chapters anticipate the passion. His suffering comes about through a coalition of powers, civic and religious.
- Jesus is for all, can't be "owned" exclusively by a particular religious group.
- Jesus reveals God's presence ("Emmanuel") for a struggling people searching for meaning and identity.

- In Mt 3-4 we read about Jesus' first encounter with John the Baptist in the desert. Here Matthew takes up and alters Mark's story. The wilderness plays an important role. John baptizes Jesus who is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Jesus' ministry then commences as he calls his first disciples and ministers to a great multitude in Galilee. Crowds are drawn to him.

SUMMARY Mt 2-4

- Mt affirms that in the ministry of Jesus, the God's Kingdom (*Basileia*) has "drawn near", that God is present and active, now.

- These opening chapters tell us so much about the evangelist's project:
 - The "Who" and "Where" of Jesus (Mt 1-2)
 - The heritage which Matthew has received
 - The purpose of the Gospel
 - We are introduced to the beginning of Jesus' activity (Mt 2-4)



Hieronymus Bosch, *The Adoration of the Magi*, (Detail of village people looking at the virgin and child and their visitors) 1510.

Photo: Michael Trainor, used with permission.

Summary

In these video sessions, we learn that:

1. In Mt 1-2, Jesus is presented as a faithful, covenant son of Israel whose birth story emulates the story of ancient Israel. He is also God's son.
2. In Mt 3-4, Jesus' integrity continues to be affirmed in his baptism, where we hear God's declaration of Jesus ("This is my Beloved Son with whom I am delighted"—3.17). Jesus witnesses to God and continues to act faithfully through his temptation encounter with Satan (4.1-11).
3. As Jesus' Galilean ministry commences, Matthew, drawing on the imagery of Isaiah, affirms that through Jesus' ministry "light" will begin to shine into the darkness of the world (4.15-16). Jesus calls his first disciples and all come to him to be healed (5.18-25).



Matthew in a painted miniature in a volume of Armenian Gospels (1609).

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For Reflection

- What new learning has emerged for you about the background to Matthew's Gospel and your reading of Mt 1-4?
- What difference has this session made to your appreciation of Matthew's Gospel?