

Background for Week 2

Today we read from the gospel of Matthew. It comes on the heels of the first Jewish revolt against Rome and the destruction of the Temple which took place in 70 CE. Dating from the last decade of the first century to the early second century, Matthew, as Pr Dave mentioned last week, is largely based on the first gospel, which is Mark.

As the study notes in the Oxford Annotated Bible comment, this gospel focuses heavily on the Jewish origin and identity of Jesus and is written to a largely Jewish audience by a Jewish author. Thus the frequent use of biblical quotations which explain and validate Jesus' actions. Jesus, "the one who best envisions and interprets God's plan for God's people," is portrayed as a great teacher reminiscent of Moses.

Due to struggles over leadership and direction within the community, there was a considerably tense climate, which one can observe as Jesus is often arguing tradition and interpretation with the Pharisees (religious leaders). It's important to be mindful of this inter-Jewish conflict, and other social and political contexts of the time, because the language of Matthew has unfortunately been misinterpreted by "some within Christianity to mean that 'the Jews' as a race should be perpetually be held accountable for killing Jesus." As we also see with the other gospels, Matthew wrote this account of Jesus keeping in mind those to whom he was preaching, which was a particular group in a specific place and time.

Text for this week: Matthew 4:1-17. (Please feel free to post your answers to these questions on our 100 Key Texts Facebook Page and engage in a discussion.)

1. Setting the stage--Read 3:13-17. What significant event takes place? Where is Jesus coming from? Keep this in the back of your mind as you read and reflect on the appointed text for this week.
2. Read Matthew 4:1-17. What jumps out at you in the text? What thoughts are inspired by it? What questions arise?
3. Next let's break it down by verse(s): Matt 4:1. What is it like to think of God, the Spirit, leading Jesus into a wilderness to be tempted? Where else do we hear, or better yet ask, about *not* being led into temptation? What have been "wilderness" spots in your life? In the life of the church?
4. Matt 4:2. Often in the bible, there are reasons for specific references to numbers. In this case, Jesus' time outside the city populace is reminiscent of Israel's journey through the wilderness after being freed from slavery in Egypt. What connection does this have with what happens in baptism? How do you understand fasting? What purpose(s) does it

serve today or does it have no relevance? Also note Matthew's human description of Jesus, "he was famished." What would be the point of this statement? When have you experienced hunger pains?

5. Matt 4:3-11. Matthew highlights Jesus' Jewish identity—often portraying him as a great teacher of Israel who had an understanding of scripture and tradition. In addition, Matthew wants to make it clear that Jesus is God's anointed, the one who fulfills the promise of a coming Messiah. Notice how even Satan quotes scripture. What message would you say Jesus is getting across or living out here? In vs. 7 when it says, "do not put the Lord your God to the test," what do you take that to mean? Is he saying we aren't allowed to question God? What about Moses and others who did? When have you had to prove yourself?
6. Matt 4:12. John, Jesus' cousin, has been arrested. Recall the two major events that have just taken place. What does this turning point signify? Where does Jesus go according to Matthew? As a baptized disciple, what are the public ministries to which you have been called at work? At home? In the congregation? In the wider community?
7. Matt 4:13-16. Observe again Matthew's use of religious texts that the mostly Jewish audience would have been familiar with to argue the election of Jesus as the Son of God. Compare Isaiah 9:1-2 with what is written in vs 15-16. In what seasons of the church year do we focus on the imagery of Jesus as the Light in the darkness? What is the significance of this illustration?
8. Matt 4:17. As we see Jesus picking up this torch of proclamation from John, who has passed on the faith to you? How have you carried it to others? What do you think Jesus means when he says, "the kingdom of heaven is near?"

For your prayers:

O Holy Spirit, as you sustained Jesus, may you do the same for us as we face the trials and hardships of life. May our hearts be devoted to you, and may our lives proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near. Amen.

Next week: Matthew 5:1-6:4