

Whidbey Island Theological Society
“Jesus through the Eyes of Matthew”
Rich Erickson, presenter
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The following comments lay out very briefly how I read and seek to understand the Gospels’ messages. I’m putting them for you in this form in order to save time this morning and to jump right in to looking at selected passages in Matthew’s Gospel.

The nature of this presentation and of its “missing segments”

- This series is part of a larger one on Matthew that I began developing some years ago. It was inspired by an increasing impression on me that Matthew (and other biblical authors) deliberately, consciously chose how to present their material (from among many options available to them). They designed their texts in such a way as to convey their own inspired theological understanding of God and his works, including their understanding of the person, life, and significance of Jesus. There are in this series another three or four segments that we don’t have time for today.
- As we will see again later, any author, in fact any communicator, must make three fundamental choices in creating any presentation: (1) what to include in it from the available material (and thus also, what to exclude); (2) how to arrange the selected material within the presentation; and (3) how to compose the presentation, word by word, sentence by sentence, etc.
- This means that the four Gospels are creative literary expressions of their authors’ *Spirit-inspired* understanding of Jesus and his significance. Rather than a prosaic textbook-like explanation, however, they have framed their presentations in the form of narrative, a story. They are theological storytellers. Through each of these Gospels, when we read them sympathetically (rather than reading them as if they were written the way we might have written them), we are given one of four inspired, nuanced interpretations of the person and work of Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel, for example, gives us insight into the way Matthew himself was led to see Jesus, the way God revealed the meaning of Jesus to Matthew. Likewise for the other three.
- Many of us want to make a sharp distinction between “history” and “story,” as if one represents truth and the other fantasy. It is a fact that some stories are pure hogwash, but the same can also be true of some presentations that pass themselves off as “history.” On the other hand, not only can reliable, prosaic histories convey truth (i.e., “what really happened”), but so can and so do reliable stories. Not only do stories convey both the “event” and its “meaning,” but so does any ordinary history worth its salt. The Gospels are not prosaic histories; they are stories. Taken together, but kept distinct from each other, the four Gospels present the story of Jesus from four different perspectives, all of them Spirit-inspired, reliable, and truthful, but stories just the same. Our job as readers and interpreters is not to puzzle out how to prove that this or that narrated event (the virgin birth, for example) actually took place, but accept it as fact and then to puzzle out what the author (e.g., Matthew or Luke) understood a virgin birth to mean in this context. Likewise with all the parables, miracles, and teachings preserved for us in them.

Outline for Flight and Return

Boundaries in Matthew 2: Travelers

Matthew 2:1-12 The story of the Magi

Matthew 2:13-23 Flight to Egypt and Return

Problems that leave us hanging

Outline for Baptism and Good Conversation

Boundaries in Matthew 3: John and Jesus

Matthew 3:1-12: John's message

Matthew 3:1-6: The set-up

Matthew 3:7-12: The sting

Matthew 3:13-17: Jesus' baptism and a good conversation

What it (possibly) means for Matthew

Outline for Touching the Untouchables

Boundaries and structure in Matthew 8:1-17

Matthew's (possible?) use of Mark

Complex of chiasms

Significance of touching

The centurion's story

Superfluity of grace

Slippery truth

Matthew 2:13-15 compared with Matthew 2:19-23

Now when they had departed,

But when Herod died,

behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream

behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

and said,

saying,

“Rise, take the child and his mother,

“Rise, take the child and his mother,

and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you;

and go to the land of Israel,

for Herod is about

for they...are dead

to search for the child, to destroy him.”

who sought the child’s life.”

And he rose and took the child and his mother **by night**,

And he rose and took the child and his mother,

and departed to Egypt,

and went to the land of Israel.

[---]

But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there,

[---]

and being warned in a dream

[see above: and departed to Egypt]

he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

and remained there **until the death of Herod.**

And he went and *dwelt in a city* **called Nazareth,**

This was to fulfil what **the Lord** had spoken by the prophet,

that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled,

“Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

“He shall be called a Nazarene.”