

5 STUDIES ON 'THE EARLY LIFE OF JESUS'

*1 Epiphany

- *1 does the Feast of the Epiphany mean anything to you (as part of your Christmas celebrations)? If so, how do you mark it?
- *2 read Psalm 72. Why do we read it to mark the Epiphany? Which themes are included which refer to Christ (the King) and which to the Magi (Wise Men or Kings)?
- *3 how does reflecting fully on this Psalm add to what Matthew tells us about the Magi's visit to Bethlehem?
- *4 read Isaiah 49:1-7. This description of the Suffering Servant is ideal for this theme. What more does it tell us about the nature of the baby the Magi have come to bring their gifts to?
- *5 read Matthew 2:1-12. What strikes you as new/unexpected/different? Or are you struck by the thought that this passage is so familiar that there is nothing new in it for 2019?
- *6 you might like to go round the room (reflectively, quietly, prayerfully) and just, in turn, each read aloud the one verse that stands out in this passage, for you!
- *7 why did you choose that passage? What does it mean to you at the start of this New Year 2019?
- *8 'On **coming** to the house, they **saw** the child with his mother Mary, and they **bowed down** and **worshipped** him. Then they **opened** their treasures and **presented** him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.' Matthew 2:11 Which of the verbs (in red) describe how you are relating to Jesus (at the moment)?
- *9 what are you most eager for in your relationship with God this year?

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*2 Flight & Return

- *1 read Matthew 2:13-23. What initial reaction do you have to this passage? What have you learned for the first time in this reading today?
- *2 what is your (honest) opinion/reaction to reading about an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream? Have you had similar experiences?
- *3 why does God chose to communicate with Joseph (and Mary) via an angel, rather than (even) more directly? See, Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 2:19; 2:22; Luke 1:26-38.
- *4 why is it important to Matthew (& his readers) that Jesus fulfils OT promises? Which ones can you find in Matthew 1-4? How does it affect your own personal understanding of just who Jesus is?
- *5 Matthew does not mention Nazareth until 2:23, why is Luke content to name the town before mentioning Bethlehem?
- *6 read Jeremiah 31:15-17. What situations in the world today does this remind you of? Who are the modern Herods?
- *7 why do Jesus and his parents have to undergo this ordeal (& why do the families of the Bethlehem boys have to suffer)? What does this tell us about the nature of God and his will?
- *8 is suffering an integral part of our discipleship? How do you suffer for your faith in Jesus Christ?

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*3 At The Temple

- *1 would you choose to teach a class of 12 year olds? What is your attitude towards those who volunteer as youth workers within the church community?
- *2 read Luke 2:41-52. Why do some people suggest that Jesus is being disrespectful towards his parents? Would you agree? Should Joseph & Mary have taken more care (& not lost him in the first place)?
- *3 what do verses 46-47 tell us about Jesus in his meeting with the biblical scholars?
- *4 Matthew 7:28-29 *When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.* What do we learn about the authority of Jesus from this passage? See also Matthew 13:54 & 22:22 and also Luke 4:22, 4:32 & 4:36. Who is this Jesus?
- *5 how do you react to verses 48-49? Some people suggest that Jesus is being disrespectful to his parents; do you agree? What more, in fact, do these verses tell us about Jesus....and what do you learn about Joseph & Mary? How do you react to these events?
- *6 Luke is eager to portray the boy Jesus as a normal child who is developing as a well-rounded human being, see verses 40 & 51-52. In which of these areas do you need growth to be a more well-rounded human being (and therefore more like Jesus Christ)?

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*4 Jesus' Baptism

*1 please read Luke 3:1-23. What do verses 3-9 tell you about John the Baptist and how he fulfils Isaiah 40:3-5? Does this make you feel easy or uneasy – why?

*2 what is John saying to the people in verses 7-14? What does that mean for us today? Please try to give concrete examples and make a practical implication for the challenge to the listener; ie how can I make this real in my life?

*3 spend some time reading Jesus' baptism accounts from all 4 Gospels.

As an (import) aside, very few events appear in all 4 Gospels. These are they.....

Jesus' baptism

Feeding the 5,000

Peter's profession

Anointing by Mary

Triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Jesus' Passion – Last Supper, Gethsemane, Trial, Crucifixion, Death & Burial

Resurrection

Matthew 3:11-17

¹¹ 'I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' ¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?'

¹⁵ Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented. ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, 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, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'

Mark 1:4-11

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps

of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

Luke 3:15-20

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, 'I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

John 1:29-34

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.'

³² Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit." ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One.'

*4 what differences do you notice in these accounts of Jesus' baptism? What do you learn from seeing this event from 4 points of view? Are there things that Luke does not mention that you learn from the other writers?

*5 do you think this passage helps the church in creating a theology of baptism? If so, how? What are the important points that reflect how we should follow in Jesus' footsteps?

*6 'He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph' 3:23. ? Given that he has already written *'The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'* 1:35, why is Luke making this comment?

*7 Who do you think Jesus is?

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*5 What Are You Waiting For?

*1 spend a few minutes, probably in pairs, thinking about what it is you are waiting for (as in longing, hoping & yearning)? What is the desire of your heart at this moment in time? Please share with the wider group.

*2 what is the Church waiting for? What is it that Christ's followers are waiting for? What effect does it have that we have waited so long?

*3 read Luke 2:22-40. What does this passage tell us that Simeon was waiting for? And Anna, what was her hope & expectation?

*4 in what way are Anna & Simeon the real heroes of this piece? How could you be more like them? Why do so many of us claim we are not very good at praying? Does this say anything about our desire for God?

*5 what do the words of the song (which we call the Nunc Dimittis, Simeon's song, v29-32) say about his relationship with God?

*6 do you see any parallels between this rite of Presentation (of Jewish babies) & the Church of England practice of (infant) Baptism? You will find it at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/christian-initiation/baptism-and-confirmation>

*7 how do you react to these verses, Luke 2:34-35?

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

*8 what would you like to ask Simeon & Anna? Would they have known the answer?