



52 STEPS

through the mountain peaks
of the Bible story

Part 33 ► Jesus, Our Messiah

Growing into manhood

The child Jesus "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him." (Luke 2:40). We're told of just one event from His early years (Luke 2:41-51). Mary and Joseph are returning home from their annual visit to Jerusalem for Passover, along with relatives and others. Unknown to them, Jesus remains behind. After a frantic search His parents find Him "in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions". Everyone is "amazed at his understanding and his answers". Jesus says to his parents, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Already, at 12 years old, Jesus knows He's to fulfil His Father's mission.

Jesus returns to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, and is "submissive to them". He increases "in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man" (2:52). The Son of God spends most of his earthly life in Nazareth, working in the family carpentry and building business.

Four Gospel portraits

Each Gospel writer gives us a unique view of Jesus's life and character.

Matthew

Matthew (also called Levi) has a Jewish audience in mind. **In Matthew's Gospel, we see Jesus as the promised King of David's dynasty**—the Messiah who will save God's people and establish God's Kingdom. But Matthew also shows us that people of *all nations* will enter God's Kingdom. He alone records Jesus's great commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:16-20).

Matthew arranges his account of Jesus's public ministry systematically—the way a teacher might arrange his material. There are five sections of Jesus's teaching, which alternate with sections telling us what He did.

Mark

Mark's Jewish name was John. John Mark appears a number of times in the New Testament. **In Mark's Gospel we see Jesus especially as God's suffering Servant**, the powerful Son of God who lays down His life to save us—thus fulfilling Isaiah's wonderful prophecy about God's

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"servant" (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). He "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Appropriate to his theme of service, Mark's Gospel is full of action. It reads like an eye-witness account, and that eye-witness was almost certainly Peter—it's thought Mark got much of his material from Peter.



[Christ Among The Doctors](#) from Wikimedia Commons

Detail from *Christ Among The Doctors* painted by Vasily Polenov. Mary and Joseph found Jesus "in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46).

Luke

Luke may well have been a Gentile (a non-Jew). Like a true historian, Luke "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (1:3 NIV), and places his account in its wider historical setting (see 2:1-2, 3:1-2).

Luke was a doctor—Paul's "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). He's a keen observer of people. Zechariah and Elizabeth, Martha and Mary, Zacchaeus, and others, spring to life in his Gospel. And in line with this, **Luke portrays Jesus especially as a human being**. For example, he alone mentions Jesus's baby clothes, and His boyhood.

And Luke presents Jesus as the Saviour of *all kinds* of people. When chief tax-collector Zacchaeus receives Jesus and repents, Jesus tells him, "Today salvation has come to this house, . . . For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:9).

And from the beginning we see the Holy Spirit active—filling John the Baptist, Elizabeth, and Zechariah; guiding Simeon; filling, leading and empowering our Lord Himself. Luke also wrote Acts; there he records the pouring out of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41).

John

John portrays Jesus as the Son of God incarnate. He writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:1,14). John shows us the closeness of Jesus's relationship with His Father (for example, 10:30,17:21).

John records Jesus speaking of Himself as "I Am"; "I am the bread of life" (6:35,48), "... the light of the world" (8:12), "... the door of the sheep" (10:7), "... the good shepherd" (10:11,14), "... the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "... the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6), "... the true vine" (15:1). And Jesus says, "before Abraham was, I am" (8:58), echoing what God said to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14, see Part 13). Through declaring Himself "I Am", Jesus is showing us He's divine, and that He's the One who brings salvation and blessing. As the

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divine Son of God, Jesus has "life in Himself" (John 5:26), and can give eternal life to us (for example, John 6:54). In fact, John wrote his Gospel: "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). And John records just eight miracles—they're 'signs' (for example, 2:11), chosen to teach us about Jesus.^[3]

John weaves spiritual principles, such as believing, life, love, light, and truth, through his Gospel. We learn about truths like new birth, eternal life, spiritual worship, living water. John alone records Jesus teaching about God making His home in the believer (14:23). He tells us more about the work of the Holy Spirit (for example, 3:8, 14:16-17,26).

And John's Gospel is full of allusions to the Old Testament.^[3] For example, we read about "water and the Spirit" (3:5, Ezekiel 36:25-27); the bronze snake in the wilderness (3:14, Numbers 21:8-9), and Jesus as the true Manna (6:48-51, Exodus 16:13-35).

Matthew depicts Jesus as the King; he gives Jesus's descent from Abraham through David and the kings of David's dynasty. A servant's genealogy isn't important—**Mark** doesn't give one. **Luke** emphasises Jesus's humanity—he traces His descent back to the first man, Adam. **John** presents Jesus as God incarnate. He gives His 'divine genealogy': He's "the only Son from the Father" (1:14).

Why did the Son of God come?

Why did the Son of God become a Man?

- Firstly, the Father sent Jesus to reveal what He Himself is like. Satan caused Adam and Eve to think wrongly about God. From that moment, God began to reveal Himself to humanity. Before Jesus was born, God revealed His nature and character especially through His dealings with His people and through the Old Testament Scriptures. But, finally, He reveals Himself on Earth in the Man Jesus Christ. He's "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15); "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus Himself said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).
- Secondly, Jesus came to show us what we should be like. In His selfless love, His humility, His reaction to insults, His patience and kindness, His fearless courage, His dependence on God and obedience to Him—in every way, Jesus shows us how we should live.
- Thirdly, Jesus came to be our Saviour. The angel Gabriel said to Joseph: "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). His unblemished life on Earth from cradle to Cross qualified Him to be our Saviour, to ransom us from all the consequences of our sin, and to give us a new life in Him.

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Jesus's baptism

Before beginning His public ministry, Jesus is baptised by John the Baptist (for example, Matthew 3:13-17). John is preparing people for Jesus's ministry (for example, Luke 3:1-18). He says, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me . . . will baptize

you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will . . . gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:11-12).

John's baptism, first and foremost, pictures cleansing from sin. But Jesus has never sinned. So why is He baptised? Because He is identifying Himself with *us*. He is going to take our place and die for us on the Cross. As He emerges from the water, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit, visible as a dove, descends and rests on Him. The Spirit is here commissioning Him as God's Messiah. 'Messiah' means 'anointed one'. But instead of being anointed with oil, the Holy Spirit Himself comes and rests on Jesus. The Father commends Jesus with these words: **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"** (Matthew 3:17). Notice, at this pivotal moment in history, how *all three Persons of the Trinity*—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—play a role. The Son is sent by the Father and empowered by the Spirit for the task that lies ahead.

Jesus's temptation

The Holy Spirit then leads Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan. Satan tempts Him in three ways: ► To meet His need for food—but outside of His Father's will. ► To perform a daring stunt, to test whether God will come to His aid. But Jesus chooses to live in perfect trust—a trust that needs no test.^[3] ► To become King of **"all the kingdoms of the world"** (Matthew 4:8) by an easy, Crossless route—by worshipping Satan, rather than by obeying God. All three temptations boil down to just *one* thing—who is at the centre of Jesus's life? Is it God, or is it Himself? Will He love the Lord His God with all His heart and soul and might (Deuteronomy 6:5)? Will He trust and obey His Father? But Jesus counters each temptation by quoting Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:13,16, 8:3). The word of God is Jesus's weapon to defeat the devil.

These three temptations recall two events in the Old Testament. ● The temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. ● Israel's 40 years of trial in the wilderness (see Deuteronomy 8:2-5). God's son Adam (he's called this in Luke 3:38) and God's son Israel (Exodus 4:22) both refused to trust and obey God. But *this* Son of God is our second Adam and the True Israel. He *always* does what pleases His Father. He's **"obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"** (Philippians 2:8).

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Next time

We look at Jesus's public ministry. He releases people from guilt, disease, death and demons. And He teaches with authority.

Bible Reading and Question

You may like to read Luke 1:1-4 and John 21:25. Here's a couple of questions to think about: ► God could have given us just one Gospel. So why does He give us four? ► And there's so much about Jesus that *isn't* recorded (as John tells us in 21:25). Why does God leave out so much, and focus on what we *do* have in the Gospels?