

Jesus of Nazareth

co-written and directed by Franco Zeffirelli

Study Guide Hour Two

In order to maximize comprehension and appreciation, before viewing the second hour, read the New Testament accounts of John the Baptist. Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-8, and Luke 3:1-20 follow one another closely and depict John as the herald of the Messiah. John's account, John 1:19-36, depicts John as identifying Jesus as "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Read too Mark 6:14-29 for an account of John's beheading at the sentence of Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and a successor of King Herod.

Minutes 1 - 1:10 remain focused on the Nativity, specifically Matthew's account which features the massacre of innocence under King Herod. King Herod was paranoid and murderous when it came to protecting his crown. In fact, Caesar Augustus once stated that he'd sooner be Herod's pig than his wife (whom Herod murdered along with his own sons), so Matthews' account is consistent with what is known of King Herod.

Minutes 1:10-1:17 are not in the Bible. It serves to setup the ongoing narrative and to introduce the Zealots. The Zealots were anti-Roman extremists who engaged in guerilla tactics to expel the Romans from their homeland. Judas was a Zealot, which is why he betrayed Jesus. Jesus was not concerned to expel the Romans, so Judas wanted him off center stage. Judas did not intend that Jesus should be executed, which is why he hung himself.

Minutes 1:18-1:21 contain the only New Testament account about Jesus' childhood -- Luke 2:41-52. Read this through as you watch.

Minutes 1:22-39 blend all four gospel accounts of John the Baptist. John is depicted just as tradition depicts him. He was a Nazirite - once self-separated from society to pursue spiritual purity. He lived on the fringes of society, which is why he is depicted as something of a wild man, but he was beloved by all. Even Herod Antipas was intrigued and impressed by him and rued that his drunken boast compelled him to execute him.

Minutes 1:39-42 are not in the Bible. They record the death of Joseph, which is an extrapolation because after the Nativity accounts, Joseph disappears from the gospel. He is assumed to have died.

Minutes 1:42-1:46 record the Baptism of Jesus by John - Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22. Read these (John does not record this event). Jesus' baptism makes known to him that he is the Messiah whose messianic vocation is to make a vicarious sacrifice for human sin by his death. This is clear from the allusion to God's "beloved." Jesus knows from the get-go what fate awaits him.

Minute 1:46 marks John's arrest by Herod's Antipas' soldiers.

Minutes 1:47-1:52 depict the beginning of Jesus' public ministry according to Luke. Read Luke 4:14-31 to see how closely the film follows the gospel. Both his own people and the religious authorities were offended and threatened by Jesus' divine claims, which he makes throughout his ministry, compare to Mark 2.

Minutes 1:52-54 introduce Jesus' disciples. The "big four" are James and his brother John (the sons of thunder), and Peter and his brother Andrew. His disciples are drawn to him but cannot fathom or accept the necessity of his death. They stand in for the reader, who is challenged to understand the necessity of his death.

Minutes 1:54-56 depict Jesus teaching at the synagogue. Jesus attempts to impart that he brings freedom from captivity to sin, which the law never could. Paul will make much of this in his letter to the Galatians.

Minutes 1:56-59 depict an early "miracle." The word miracle does not appear in the Bible. The Greek here is deed of power. The import of his miracles is to prove Jesus's divine identity and to proclaim that God stands for mercy, wholeness, and restoration; and in the case of exorcisms that God stands fast against evil as well. Note that the demon (a representation of evil) identifies Jesus. This miracle suggests, profoundly, that evil can recognize the divine.

Minute 1:59 introduces Peter. Peter is just as he is depicted - hot headed and impulsive. Jesus has a soft spot for him, and Peter will pride himself that he is Jesus' first and foremost disciple. The stage is now set for the miraculous catch.

Questions for consideration.

1. History gives ample evidence that evil recognizes good, and the good eventually triumphs over it. This demands the conclusion that good has primacy over evil, and by extension peace over war and justice over injustice. Can this be accounted for apart from God?
2. John the Baptist is controversial. Jesus is even more controversial. How does one distinguish between good controversy and bad controversy (especially in our times)?
3. Do you find dramatizations of the gospels helpful, or do they discredit it?

Next up: the most influential words ever spoken: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Tune in.