

## SESSION FOUR - JESUS

### WORDS OF WISDOM

The similarities and differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke have given rise to what scholars call the “Synoptic Problem.” The synoptic or “common view” of these three texts leads to further questions not only about how similar they are in some places, but how different they are from one another and from John. The most obvious difference between the first three gospels and the Gospel according to John is the order of events:

### The Synoptic Gospels

*Begins with John the Baptist*

*OR birth and childhood stories*

*Jesus is baptized by John*

*Jesus speaks in parables and aphorisms*

*Jesus is a sage*

*Jesus is an exorcist*

*The “Kingdom of God” is the  
theme of Jesus’ teaching*

*Jesus has little to say about himself*

*Jesus takes up the cause  
of the poor and oppressed*

*Jesus’ public ministry: 1 year*

*Temple incident: late in the story*

*Jesus eats a last supper  
with his disciples*

### The Gospel of John

*Begins with creation –*

*no birth or childhood stories*

*Baptism of Jesus assumed but not mentioned*

*Jesus speaks in long, involved discourses*

*Jesus is a philosopher and a mystic*

*Jesus performs no exorcisms*

*Jesus himself is the theme  
of his own teaching*

*Jesus reflects at length  
on his own mission and person*

*Jesus has little or nothing to say  
about the poor and oppressed*

*Jesus’ public ministry: 3 years*

*Temple incident: early in the story*

*Foot washing instead of the last supper*

As one explores the chronological differences of the gospels, it also becomes clear that there is a completely different cast of characters in some places, different styles and vocabularies, and different political and theological agendas.

Find a Gospel Parallel (a book that displays the four gospels in side-by-side vertical columns) or visit an online version (like “The Five Gospels Parallels” at <http://www.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis/>). Compare some of your favorite Jesus stories across the gospels. Take note of how they are the same or different. Use a commentary or other sources to determine some of the biases each evangelist brings to their writing.