

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.