

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2018 LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS,
A REDEMPTORIST
MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

C0312A

Finding the Heart of Jesus's Life

LOOKING AT JESUS IN THE GOSPELS

KENNETH R. OVERBERG



How do you and I learn to be Christian disciples if not by exploring the events of Jesus' life? We can discover Jesus' experience only

by listening carefully to what the Christian community said about him in the Scriptures. Yet the Scriptures, as the Church teaches, are accounts of faith. Thus, Scripture writers were not so much concerned with historical details as they were with conveying the meaning of Jesus' presence among us. How do we get to the Jesus the disciples encountered, the experiences behind the statements of faith?

Because Scripture and Church teachings emphasize the divinity of Jesus, our own experience of Jesus is just about the opposite from the disciples' experience of him. The disciples first encountered someone they knew as a fellow human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Only gradually—indeed, not until after the resurrection—would they recognize and proclaim his divinity.

For those of us who come almost 2,000 years later, faith in Jesus' divinity is almost taken for granted, for it is affirmed throughout the gospels. Indeed, many of us may find it easier to believe that Jesus is God than to accept that he was truly human. In order to appreciate as fully as possible the events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, we must follow the same path the disciples followed, beginning with the human Jesus. In this *Update*, we'll look at Jesus' vision and his encounters with others as found in the gospels. In doing so, we'll get a glimpse at the heart of his earthly life.

JESUS' BIRTH

Only two New Testament books describe the birth of Jesus: Luke (1:1—2:52) and Matthew (1:1—2:23). But the two stories are very, very different in their details. Because most of us have combined the two stories in our hearts and minds, we realize these differences only by looking at the two accounts separately. Matthew focuses on Joseph, has Mary and Joseph living in Bethlehem, and includes the Magi and the flight into Egypt. Luke focuses on Mary, has Mary and Joseph living in Nazareth (going to Bethlehem only for the Roman census), and includes the shepherds and a peaceful visit of the Holy Family to Jerusalem.

In his extensive study of the infancy narratives, the late Scripture scholar Raymond Brown emphasizes that what is important is the religious message of the stories. What is this message? Brown claims it is twofold: to proclaim the identity of Jesus as truly God and truly human and to show how Jesus is linked to and fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures. Brown states that each infancy narrative is, in fact, the whole gospel in miniature: the full identity of Jesus (divine and human) is revealed; this good news is shared with others and accepted by some (shepherds, Magi, Simeon, Anna) but rejected by others (Herod the king, the chief priests and scribes). Accordingly, we must focus on the meaning and not on the details of the stories.

Surely an important dimension of Jesus' life was his experience of religion. The story of the people of Israel was Jesus' story. As he grew, Jesus

listened to and prayed with the Hebrew Scriptures. He pondered the lives of Abraham and Moses, of Jeremiah and Isaiah. Their God was Jesus' God—a God who continued to be active in the people's lives, freeing and choosing and calling them back to the covenant. This Jewish context, then, nurtured Jesus' knowledge of and relationship with God.

JESUS' MISSION

Luke develops the picture of Jesus' identity and mission in the marvelous and powerful scene of the keynote



Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.
Liguori.org • 800-325-9521