



Lecture #2, Part 2

# The Shape of the Gospel Story: The Synoptic Gospels

**Theme:**

Synoptic “seeing together”

*Each Gospel was likely written for a different community of faith at a different time and location to bring the Gospel witness to bear on the needs of that particular community.*

(Note: **Mark** is listed first because it is the simplest version of the narrative, which most biblical scholars consider to be the first Gospel written).

## 1. Introduction

<b>Mk</b> 1:1	<b>Mt</b> 1:1-2:23	<b>Lk</b> 1:1-2:52
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The Synoptics differ widely in how they begin the Gospel narratives.

### Mark

has only a one verse introduction that provides no information beyond labeling the Gospel a “beginning” (**1:1**)

### Matthew’s

two chapters include an introductory genealogy (**1:1-17**), Joseph’s dream about accepting Mary (**1:18-25**), the visit of the Magi (**2:1-12**), the flight of the family to Egypt (**2:13-15**), Herod’s murder of the infants in Bethlehem (**2:16-18**), and the family’s return to Nazareth (**2:19-23**).

### Luke

begins a much longer two chapter account with a four-verse dedication to Theophilus (**1:1-4**). He then tells us of Zachariah’s encounter with an angel in the temple (**1:5-23**), the conception of John the Baptist (**1:24-25**), the Annunciation of Jesus’ birth to Mary (**1:26-38**), the visit of Mary with Elizabeth climaxing with Mary’s song the *Magnificat* (**1:39-56**), the birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah’s response in the *Benedictus* (**1:57-79**), the birth of Jesus in a stable (**2:1-7**), the visit of the shepherds (**2:8-20**), the circumcision of Jesus and his presentation in the temple (**2:21-24**), the prophecies of Simeon and Anna (**2:25-38**), and the account of Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve (**2:41-52**).



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## 2. Beginning of Jesus Ministry

Mk	Mt	Lk
1:2-13	3:1-4:11	3:1-4:13

The beginning of Jesus' ministry is very similar in all three Synoptics. All include stories of John the Baptist, Jesus' baptism, and his temptation, although they differ in specific content and arrangement.

### Mark

is typically much shorter taking only seven verses for John the Baptist ([1:2-8](#)), three verses for Jesus' baptism ([1:9-11](#)), and presenting the Temptation narrative in only two verses ([1:12-13](#)), omitting any details of what the temptations were.

### Matthew

expands the account of John the Baptist, telling us about his appearance as well as the content of his message ([3:1-12](#)). Matthew adds the deference of John to Jesus at the baptism ([3:14-15](#)). Matthew also expands the temptation narrative to include the nature of the three temptations with biblical quotations by Jesus ([4:1-11](#)).

### Luke

follows Matthew closely here but adds historical details, as well as additional information about the preaching of John ([3:10-14](#)) and a genealogy of Jesus ([3:23-38](#)).

## 3. Jesus' Galilean Ministry

Mk	Mt	Lk
1:14-8:26	4:12-16:12	4:14-9:17 [50]

This is the largest section of the Gospels and includes nearly half of [Mark](#) and [Matthew](#) and slightly less of [Luke](#). There are many geographical markers but few indications of time. This combined with the fact that individual stories are placed in different contexts in the Gospels means that a reliable chronology of the material is virtually impossible. Once again there is a great deal of difference in how the material is arranged and used. Even with those differences, there are several features that are shared by all three Gospels.

**a.** While arranged differently, *the teachings of Jesus* figure prominently in this section of the Synoptics. This includes sayings associated with miracles and as responses to people and circumstances, teaching in parables, and teachings directed to the twelve disciples as well as larger group of followers and the crowds in general.

**b.** The *calling of the twelve*, their commissioning, and various narratives surrounding them are included in all three Synoptics.



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c. Most of the *miracle stories* of the Gospels are in this section. About ten of these occur in all three Gospels, although they are given different contexts and points of emphasis. There are other accounts that occur in only one or two of the Synoptics.