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January 24, 2018—“The Duality of Jesus”

I Prayer

II Introduction

In our last Bible Study, “The Reality of Jesus,” we examined the *Matthew 2* narrative of what we now call the Feast of the Epiphany. We looked at how the magi/wise men found the newborn messiah, the baby Jesus, by following a star that led them to Bethlehem and how after they evaded Herod’s directives in returning to Jerusalem, an angel of the Lord had Joseph lead his family to Egypt, essentially hiding out until things were safe. With respect to the journey into Egypt, we also discussed *Revelation 1:14*’s possible implications of John the Evangelist’s vision of Jesus, as it relates to African Americans and people of color. In also attempting to tie our liturgical seasons to the secular calendar, we discussed how the Epiphany’s date, January 6th, correlates directly to our commencement of the Carnival Season in New Orleans. Moreover, as you are aware, the Carnival Season’s end and the beginning of the Lenten liturgical season correlates with “Fat Tuesday,” or Mardi Gras, the day before Ash Wednesday.

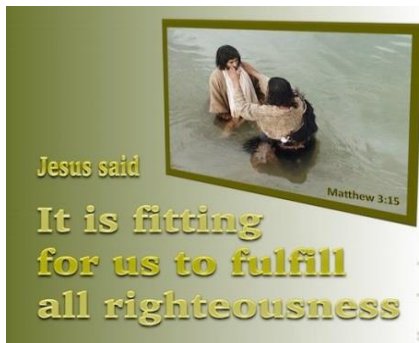
This week, in building on *Matthew 2*, we move to *Matthew 3 & 4* for a lesson entitled “The Duality of Jesus.” This evening, after exploring how God became flesh (The Reality of Jesus”) we now look at Jesus’ duality (wholly human and wholly divine) early in his ministry. In our faith tradition, Jesus’ duality is symbolized by the two candles that sit atop the altar.

In *Matthew 3*, we travel to the Judean countryside where Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, is preaching the good news about the coming of the messiah. Although John is widely assumed to be the messiah, he quickly rebuts those assumptions by identifying himself as a precursor for Jesus. *Matthew 3* also gives us an account of Jesus’ baptism, an act of great significance for at least two reasons, related to Jesus’ simultaneous humanity and divinity. First, it underscores Jesus’ humanity in that he completely identified with humankind’s sins and failures. Second, it simultaneously signified Jesus’ divinity, because of God’s pronouncement and the public realization that Jesus was in fact the messiah and that his earthy ministry had begun. In *Matthew 3*, therefore, we truly see “The Duality of Jesus!”

Whereas *Matthew 3* closes with Jesus beginning his public ministry, *Matthew 4* takes us to his first two tasks. First, Jesus wrestled with his “duality” because his divinity had to overcome his human tendencies and weaknesses. Second, after passing his temptations/tests, Jesus called his first disciples, an act evidencing of his divinity and his unique role as the messiah.

III Textual Examination: *Matthew 3* (read out loud)

- The initial verses of Chapter 3 give us an image of John the Baptist. How would you imagine him? Does he meet your conventional images of a preacher? Who were his parents? Why do you think people assumed him to be the messiah? If he was “preaching” in New Orleans today, what type of ministry do you think he’d be leading and where would he be?
- In verses 7-9, what did John mean by challenging the Pharisees and Sadducees as he did?
- In verses 11-12, John gives some pretty clear disclaimers that his *is not* the messiah. Why do you think he uses the specific language he uses and to who does his choice of words point?



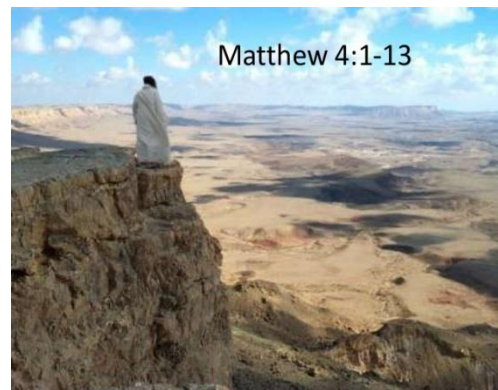
- In verses 13-15, John is obviously put aback by Jesus’ desire for John to baptize him. Who is showing humility in these verses? Why?

- In verses 16-17, we clearly see Jesus’ divinity. If you were there, in the Judean countryside where Jesus’ baptism occurred, describe how you might feel? Would you go tell others what you saw? Could the word have traveled? In Chapter 4, after Jesus’ tests in

the wilderness, the first disciples he calls have absolutely no problem stopping what they are doing to join his ministry

IV Textual Examination: *Matthew 4* (read out loud)

- Jesus’ first acts in ministry are fasting and praying, essentially fighting to allow his “divinity” to overcome his “humanity.” Do any of us have potential for similar acts? Is there a “good” and “bad” in us all? How do we prepare ourselves for certain very significant events? Let’s discuss
- Jesus relies on passages from the Jewish Torah, specifically a part thereof that we now call *Deuteronomy*, in rebuking Satan/the Tempter. Why do you think this is? What would you have done?
- (verses 18-22) After Jesus prepared himself for public ministry, he called his first disciples. Put yourself in their shoes (sandals). What was that have been like? Would



you have been fearful? If you were a religious person (most Jews were), would you have been in awe to be with “the messiah?”

- (verses 23-25) After calling his first disciples, Jesus begins to heal the sick and builds quite a following (a perfect way to end Chapter 4, because in Chapter 5 Jesus is surrounded by many, many people when he begins his famous Sermon on the Mount). Why do you think he did this first, opposed to preaching the good news? What does say for us today, as we attempt to share the good news with others? What lesson can we learn?

V **Comments and/or Questions**

VI **Closing Prayer**

