Welcome to part 7 of this series, “Who Is Jesus?” So far we have studied:

✓ The Pre-Existent Jesus
✓ Jesus in the Old Testament and the Miracle of the Incarnation
✓ The birth of our Lord
✓ Herod the Great and his temporary impact on the Baby Jesus
✓ The Healing Jesus
✓ The Essenes, the Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist

The first two years of Jesus’ earthly life, we believe, were spent in Bethlehem. That’s where the wise men found Him, along with Mary and Joseph. When Jesus was just 8 days old, He was dedicated at the Temple:

Luke 2:21-24

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. [22] And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; [23] (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) [24] And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

In those days, there were three ceremonies that involved a newborn male child:

1. Circumcision
2. Dedication of the child to God (the redemption of the first-born)
3. Purification of the mother after 40 days

All three of these ceremonies emphasized the fact that the child was not given to the parent, only lent.

Matthew 2:11

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

The wise men came to a HOUSE, not the manger. Further, Herod ordered the death of
children under the age of TWO.

Now the family returned to Nazareth:  Luke 2:39-40
And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. [40] And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

About those 12 “growing up” years in Nazareth we know little. We do know however that Mary and Joseph had more children (at least six that we know of). Matthew 13:54-56

And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? [55] Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?
[56] And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

In an effort to further deify the Virgin Mary, the Roman Catholics and several other church bodies teach that Jesus was an only child. There are several biblical references, in addition to the one above, that negate that teaching.

When Jesus was 12, Joseph and Mary return with Him to Jerusalem and the Temple: Luke 2:41-52

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. [42] And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. [43] And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. [44] But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. [45] And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. [46] And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. [47] And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. [48] And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. [49] And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?
[50] And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. [51] And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. [52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

This is a supremely important passage in the Gospel story.  It was laid down by law that
every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem must attend the Passover (which celebrated the Jews deliverance from Egypt - book of Exodus). It was the aim of every Jew in all the world at least once in a lifetime to attend that feast.

A Jewish boy became a man when he was twelve years of age. Then he became a "son of the law" and had to take the obligations of the law upon him. So at twelve Jesus went to the Passover.

When His parents returned, Jesus lingered behind. It was not through carelessness that they did not miss Him. Usually the women in a caravan started out much earlier than the men for they traveled more slowly. The two sections would not meet until the evening encampment was reached. It was Jesus' first Passover. No doubt Joseph thought He was with Mary and Mary thought he was with Joseph.

Now about eighteen years will pass before we pick up the narrative of Jesus' life. The story actually picks up with John the Baptist and Caesar Tiberius.

CAESAR TIBERIAS

Physician Luke, a medical doctor, precisely gives us the time table for this story. He listed particulars:

- **Luke 3:1** Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar....
  Tiberias was the successor to Caesar Augustus. Tiberius gained full power about A.D. 14. The 15th year of his rule would have begun about 28 or 29 A.D., somewhere near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Tiberius ruled from 14-37 A.D. He was the step-son of Caesar Augustus. In his early life, Tiberius was one of Rome’s greatest generals. But later in his reign, he came to be known as a dark, reclusive, somber Caesar. When his son Drusus died 23 A.D., something in the man seemed to “snap.” In 26 A.D. Tiberius left Rome and moved to the Isle of Capri. He left his administration in Rome to the hands of the Praetorian Prefect Sejanus, an effective ruler, but who began plotting against Tiberius. (It is my opinion that Sejanus downfall had something to do with Pilate’s terror of upsetting the Emperor (“...if you let this man, Jesus, go, you are no friend of Caesar!”) Sejanus was caught red-handed and executed. Tiberius’ successor was the quite insane Caligula. (in the old film “The Robe” the actor Jay Robinson - my friend and devoted Christian depicted Caligula)

- Following scriptures (Luke 3:1-6) give three dates that correspond with the
political organization of ancient Israel (then known as Palestine). Luke 3:1-6

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, [2] Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias (John the Baptist) in the wilderness. [3] And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; [4] As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. [5] Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; [6] And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

John the Baptist executed by Herod (son of King Herod the Great)

When King Herod the Great died (around 4 B.C.), his son Archelaus followed him on the throne, but was so incompetent that Rome had him banished. It was this point that Rome declared, “No more ‘king herods’” and replaced them with governors or, in this
This is a “model” of Herod’s palace in Jordan - Machareus where John the Baptist died

governors or, in this case, a “tetrarch”, which means “quarter-power.” This Herod had divorced his wife and had married his brother’s wife while on a trip to Rome. This incensed the Jewish population - and really triggered John the Baptist. We have now moved ahead to A.D. 28 – which is right at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

Matthew 14:1-5

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, [2] And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

[3] For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. [4] For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. [5] And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

This is the same “Herod” who would taunt Jesus on the day of His crucifixion. He was a weak man, under the thumb of his illegitimate wife Herodias, former wife of his brother. She would not tolerate John’s preaching about repentance, and certainly bristled when she heard John condemn her marriage to Herod.
Herod did not want to execute John the Baptist because he feared the Jewish crowds in the area. But his wife was determined and she came up with the wicked plot:

Matthew 14:6-12

But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. [7] Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. [8] And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. [9] And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. [10] And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. [11] And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. [12] And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

Books and films have been produced about the “dance of Salome.” The dance brought about the beheading of John. His disciples buried the corpse somewhere, we do not know where. So what happened to this pathetic “king?” He would later have the meeting with Jesus on the day of our Lord’s death. But all Herod’s wicked actions resulted in nothing but ashes. By this time the emperor was Caligula, probably the most wicked and demented ruler Rome ever had. Caligula gave Herod’s entire position and holdings to a man named Agrippa (who would come into play during Paul’s life) and banished Herod to ancient Gaul (we know today as France, Belgium and Luxembourg). Herod languished there, broke and powerless, until the very day he died.

Enter Jesus

Matthew 14:13-14

When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. [14] And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Note carefully line 30 (verse 14): Jesus was moved with compassion. Is that not a prime ingredient of the follower of Christ?

Jesus was God but He was also man. He had now just lost His cousin and dear friend, John the Baptist. In His sorrow, He sought to be alone. Not an easy task in Galilee. People who go with me to Israel often comment on the reality of how small Israel is in its entirety. But Galilee itself was only 50 miles north to south and about 25 miles west to east. The historian of that day, Josephus, reminds us that within that small area there
were 204 towns, many of which held populations of 15,000 or more. In such congestion of population it was not easy to get away. But on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, it was much more quiet. So many of the Galileans were fishermen that it was not difficult for Jesus to enlist one of their boast and sail to the other side.

Bear in mind, that Jesus was all-knowing and He was aware that His cross was just a scant three years away. He knew He had to meet with God before He met with humanity. (Good idea for all Christian spokespersons.

There are places on the eastern bank of the Sea of Galilee (which is really a lake) at a high enough elevation one can see everything on the water. From such a viewpoint there on the eastern shore, it would have been easy for a lot of people to see Jesus’ boat making its way to the eastern shore. When He arrived, there were multitudes awaiting Him.

There are four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All four were accurate in their accounts; but we must remember four different reporters would see things in four different ways. So the order of Jesus ministries varies from gospel to gospel.

Matthew’s Account (he himself was a resident of Capernaum)
Matthew 4:12-17
Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; [13] And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: [14] That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, [15] The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; [16] The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. [17] From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Mark’s Account (his major resource was Peter who also lived in Capernaum)
Mark 1:14-15
Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, [15] And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Luke’s Account
Luke 4:14-15
And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. [15] And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.
I entered Central Bible College in 1954 at the ripe old age of 17. It was a small college, but from it came hundreds of pastors, missionaries and evangelists. The college is no longer in existence but merged with Evangel University in Springfield just a few years ago.

I took a course called The Gospels, taught by Dr. Donald Johns, one of the great teachers I have ever known. (And toughest!) The Gospel of Mark was our primary resource for that class. Our text was a small book simply titled “Gospel of Mark,” written by Dr. Charles Eerdman, published by Westminster. I still have it and refer to it on various occasions. On page 29, Eerdman quickly identified the reason Mark wrote this account of the Christ:

Mark is distinctively the Gospel of the public ministry of our Lord. The writer is less concerned than Matthew to prove that Jesus is the Messiah who exactly fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament. He omits many details needed by Luke to complete his portrait of the ideal Man. He does not seek to demonstrate with the convincing proofs of John the deity of Christ. But he gives a complete story of the public life of Jesus.

I loved that paragraph from Eerdman because it showed reason for the differences in the four Gospels.

CAPERNAUM - JESUS’ HOME DURING HIS 3-YEAR EARTHLY MINISTRY

Mark 1:21-28

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. [22] And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. [23] And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, [24] Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. [25] And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. [26] And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. [27] And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. [28] And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

The ruins of ancient Capernaum lie on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is easy to understand why Jesus loved this location. Matthew 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: Matthew 9:1 And he entered into a ship,
Aerial view of Capernaum (Sea of Galilee in foreground). The figure "1" is written just in front of Peter's home, now covered by a relatively new church. The figure "2" shows the location of the 3rd century synagogue, built over the ruins of the synagogue Jesus would have known.

and passed over, and came into his own city. The Hebrew name for Capernaum is Kefar Nahum which means "the village of Nahum" - not named for the Old Testament prophet Nahum.

Jesus made His headquarters here during the 3 ½ years of His earthly ministry, from age 30 to the Cross. Here He chose His first disciples and preached in the synagogue (#2 in the picture above). Capernaum was certainly not a large, heavily-populated area such as the walled city of Jerusalem to the south. Josephus described Capernaum as a place "so rich in soil and pasturage and producer of such variety of trees that even the most indolent are tempted by these facilities to devote themselves to agriculture." Capernaum is situated 600 feet below sea level, so even in the dead of winter the temperatures are in the 60's and 70's. Small wonder Jesus loved this place after having grown up in cold and wintry Nazareth.

Today bananas grow in abundance all around the town. If Jesus taught eternal lessons utilizing things he saw, such as the glorious lilies of the field, or farmers sowing seed, or hand-turned grain mills, or sheep herds, His rapt listeners did not need to use much
imagination to get His point. The listeners saw these things every day.

Capernaum was no only a center of agriculture (to this day!), it was involved in
international trade since it was located on the major road between Damascus and Egypt.
It was also linked by road and water with a string of towns and cities on the shores of the
Sea of Galilee.

It is believed that the population of Capernaum in Jesus’ day was between 5 and 6
thousand people, primarily Jewish. Just ten miles or so south, along the shore, was the
city of Tiberias, much more cosmopolitan.

The Synagogue

As already noted in this study, the synagogue ruins we find now in Capernaum, though
lovely and appealing, represent a third-century house of worship. The original one,
located beneath the present one we see, probably were the original one Jesus knew so
well. The function of synagogues in the first century was to provide a place where the
local community could assemble for a wide variety of purposes, including study. Each
year, when we visit there, I assemble our group inside the present ruins of the synagogue
and I teach the following story from Jesus’ life:

Mark 3:1-6

  And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a
  withered hand. [2] And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the
  sabbath day; that they might accuse him. [3] And he saith unto the man which had
  the withered hand, Stand forth. [4] And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good
  on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.
  [5] And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the
  hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he
  stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. [6] And the Pharisees
  went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they
  might destroy him.

What a stage! Imagine the thrill of dramatizing that story in the place where it actually
occurred!

We continue with the early ministry of Jesus next time.