

CHRISTMAS STORIES IN MATTHEW & LUKE

HOW ARE THE TWO ACCOUNTS SIMILAR?

- 1) Jesus' parents are Mary and Joseph.
- 2) Jesus is born in Bethlehem (in order to fulfill messianic prophecy) but ends up in Nazareth where he grows up.
- 3) His birth is both human and divine, indicating his divine status even as he is human like the rest of us.
- 4) He has been sent by God to save the world from the mess it's in. 'Salvation' means healing and wholeness.

HOW ARE THE TWO ACCOUNTS DIFFERENT?

- 1) In Matthew, the key actor is Joseph, whereas in Luke it is Mary.
- 2) In Matthew, Jesus is born in a house in Bethlehem where Joseph and Mary live, whereas in Luke they travel from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem, for taxation purposes, because that's where Joseph (the male) is from originally.
- 3) Matthew's story makes connections with the founding Hebrew stories: Joseph in Egypt rescuing his family, slavery and persecution under the Egyptian King Pharaoh hundreds of years later, and liberation from slavery with the leadership of Moses. This legitimates Jesus as the new Messiah to a Hebrew audience.

Luke's story contrasts the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth over against the glory of Rome - King Jesus vs King Caesar. This legitimates Jesus to a gentile audience experiencing social oppression and a Jewish audience recognizing authenticity among the poor and disenfranchised. King Caesar is also worshipped by the religious and political authorities of Israel (not literally, but in their hunger for power, wealth and control over the people).

- 4) Matthew's moral concerns are very Hebrew: it's about sin vs righteousness, right vs wrong, faithfulness to God vs faithlessness before God. Jesus will save the world from destructive sin through a justice defined by love.

Luke's moral concerns are very gentile (non-Hebrew) focussed on status: rich vs poor, powerful vs powerless, oppressors vs oppressed, male versus female, slave vs free. God is aligned with those at the bottom end, shining a light at what's wrong with the world. Jesus will save the world from the oppression of the powerful through a justice defined by love.