

Defining Moments

Helpful Resources

Four Voices, One Song (p.37), Historical and Political Context (p.39), Maps of Palestine and Jerusalem (p.47, 48)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

In just a few chapters, we covered nearly 30 years of Jesus' life. We closed the incredible Christmas story with the visit of the wise men and his family's escape to Egypt. Next, we witnessed Jesus' visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve. Then, we skipped eighteen years to John the Baptist's interaction with Jesus, His subsequent desert temptation, and the first of His disciples. While these stories are very familiar to us, we often overlook their significance. The gospel writers included them for a purpose. Each event highlights a defining moment in Jesus' identity as the Messiah. Let's consider some of these defining moments.

- Defining Moments of Jesus' Identity

1. **Visit of the Wise Men** (*Matt. 2:1-12*): Jesus was born in Bethlehem because He was a descendant of King David, whose family was from Bethlehem. However, for foreigners to follow a star to Jerusalem and ask, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" sheds more light on Jesus' identity. He was (and is) the Promised One. This news was disturbing to Herod, the current "king of the Jews," who sought to eliminate the threat to his rule. Herod's order (really Satan's) is a foreshadowing of Jesus' future. People want Him dead.
2. **The Greater Moses** (*Matt. 2:13-18*): When Jesus was a baby, His family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's evil order, a fulfillment of prophecy (*Hos. 11:1*). However, Moses was also a type of Christ. We will see many similarities between the two men (i.e., both left Egypt, spent time in the desert, performed miracles with bread and water, and led people to a Promised Land), but Jesus will be the better Moses (*Heb. 3:1-6*).
3. **Jesus Among the Teachers** (*Luke 2:46, 47*): After Jesus' parents "lost" Him for a time, they found Him in the Temple amid the teachers, both listening and asking questions. Here is a foreshadowing of Jesus as the master Teacher or Rabbi, whose scriptural knowledge, authority, and teaching impressed others. Also, this scene foreshadows Jesus' future confrontations with the religious leaders (Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes).
4. **Baptism** (*Matt. 3:13-17*): Jesus was baptized by John "to fulfill all righteousness," meaning that it was a necessary event even though Jesus had no sins of which to repent. His baptism was necessary for several reasons. First, it affirmed John's role as the forerunner of the Messiah. Second, it affirmed Jesus as the Messiah. Third, His baptism signified the beginning of His role as our Great High Priest (*Ex. 29:1, 4; Lev. 8:6-9; Heb. 3:1; 4:14*). Fourth, His baptism symbolized the purpose of His life and ministry, to exchange His righteousness for our sinfulness. Next, it foreshadowed Jesus' death and resurrection; and finally, it set an example for His followers, whom He later commanded to be baptized (*Matt. 28:19*).

5. **Temptation** (*Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-15*): As a human, Jesus had to be tempted in all things, as we are. However, to prove His deity and to be the perfect sin sacrifice acceptable to God, Jesus had to be sinless. Thus, Jesus had to endure temptation without giving in to it (*Heb. 4:15*). But didn't Jesus sin as a child? No. Even growing up, the Bible records that Jesus was an obedient son who honored His earthly parents (*Luke 2:51*).
 6. **Lamb of God** (*John 1:29-37*): The role or purpose of John the Baptist's ministry was to point others to the Messiah when He arrived (*Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3-5*), which he did numerous times. The most telling moment was John's declaration that Jesus was "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." In that moment, John identified Jesus as the sin sacrifice who would provide forgiveness of sins through His death on the cross.
 7. **Disciples** (*John 1:35-51*): As the story shifted from John to Jesus, we saw John's disciples leaving him to follow the Messiah. These men were the first of Jesus' twelve disciples. They would play an integral role in the development and spread of Christianity.
- Prophetic Passages
 1. **Bethlehem** (*Mic. 5:2; 2 Sam. 5:2*): The Messiah had to be born in David's hometown.
 2. **Star** (*Num. 24:17*): The magi knew the prophecies and followed the star to the Messiah.
 3. **Killing Babies** (*Jer. 31:15*): The Lord predicted Herod's evil order against the baby boys.
 4. **Someone Is Coming to Judge** (*Mk. 1:7, 8; Matt. 3:11, 12; Lk. 3:15-18*): While Jesus will judge all men, it will not be at His first coming but rather at His second coming.
 5. **Jacob's Ladder** (*Gen. 28:10-17; Jn. 1:51*): Jesus connected Himself to this Old Testament story, illustrating that He is salvation, the way to ascend to heaven.
 - Personal Application
 1. **Bearing Fruit** (*Luke 3:7-14*): John was the last Old Testament prophet. What would he preach to the people? In essence, he taught that a life of one who says he has repented of his sins will look different than before. In other words, one's fruit gives evidence of one's root. Today, we might say that "faith without works is dead" (*James 2:14-26*).
 2. **Temptation** (*Matt. 4:1-11*): Satan tempted Jesus by distorting God's Word, but Jesus resisted temptation by quoting the truths of God's Word. While temptation can seem overwhelming in the moment, God's Word promises help in resisting it (*1 Cor. 10:13*).
 3. **Defining Moments**: If you were to write about your life, who you are as a person, and what God has done for you, some defining moments would surface. God uses people, situations, and difficult lessons to make you more like Christ. Take time to thank Him!

The Bottom Line

The early events in Jesus' life were foundational to His role as the Messiah and Savior.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think the Bible skips Jesus' childhood and jumps straight to His ministry?
2. What does your "fruit" (works) reveal about your "root" (heart)?
3. What's the difference between the baptisms of John and Jesus?
4. What did Paul mean that God provides "a way of escape" in temptation? (*1 Cor. 10:13*)
5. Since salvation, what are your top three "defining moments" in life?