

# four stories of Jesus

# four stories of Jesus

**Matthew**

**Mark**

**Luke**

**John**

**Thomas**

discussion questions for the end of the hour

what are you taking away from this course?

what are you curious about exploring further?

narrative criticism

vs.

“the historical-critical method”

The historical critical method was pioneered in the 19th century by (mostly) German scholars. Products of the Enlightenment, they were confident that objective, “scientific” methodologies could cut through layers of tradition and mythology and uncover the historical Jesus.

Rudolf Bultmann and *Entmythologisierung* ...

# **the parable of the sower**

Mark 4:3-9

3 “Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” 9 And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

**text criticism** — analyzing the fine details of hundreds of manuscripts, papyri, and codexes to determine the original version of a text

οὐκ ἔδωκεν. 8 καὶ ἄλλα ἔπεσεν εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν καλήν, καὶ ἐδίδου καρπὸν ἀναβαίοντα καὶ αὐξανόμενα<sup>1</sup>, καὶ ἔφερον ἔν<sup>2</sup> τριάκοντα καὶ ἔν<sup>2</sup> ἐξήκοντα καὶ ἔν<sup>2</sup> ἑκατόν. 9 καὶ ἔλεγεν, Ὅς ἔχει ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω.

<sup>1</sup> 8 {C} καὶ αὐξανόμενα N B 1071 syr<sup>pvid</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> geo<sup>27</sup> // καὶ αὐξανόμενον A D L W Δ 892 syr<sup>hvid</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> // καὶ αὐξάνοντα C K Θ Π f<sup>1</sup> f<sup>13</sup> 28 33 700 1009 1010 1079 1195 1216 1230 1241 1242 1253 1344 1365 1546 1646 2148 2174 Byz Lect goth geo<sup>17</sup> // καὶ αὐξανόμενον or καὶ αὐξάνοντα it<sup>(a),aur,b,c,d,f,(ff<sup>2</sup>),i,l,q,r<sup>1</sup></sup> vg // omit 565 syr<sup>a</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 8 {C} ἔν...ἔν...ἔν D (L εἰς...ἔν...ἔν) f<sup>13</sup> 1365 1546 Lect it<sup>a,aur,b,(c),d,f,(ff<sup>2</sup>),i,l,(q),r<sup>1</sup></sup> vg syr<sup>p</sup> cop<sup>sa,bo</sup> goth Diatessaron<sup>a</sup> // ἔν...ἔν...ἔν (B εἰς...ἔν...ἔν) K Π f<sup>1</sup> 33 565 892 1009 1010 1079 1195 1216 1230 1241 1242 1253 1344 1646

35 ὅς...θεοῦ Jn 7.17; 9.31

4 1 Mk 3.7-9; Lk 5.1-3

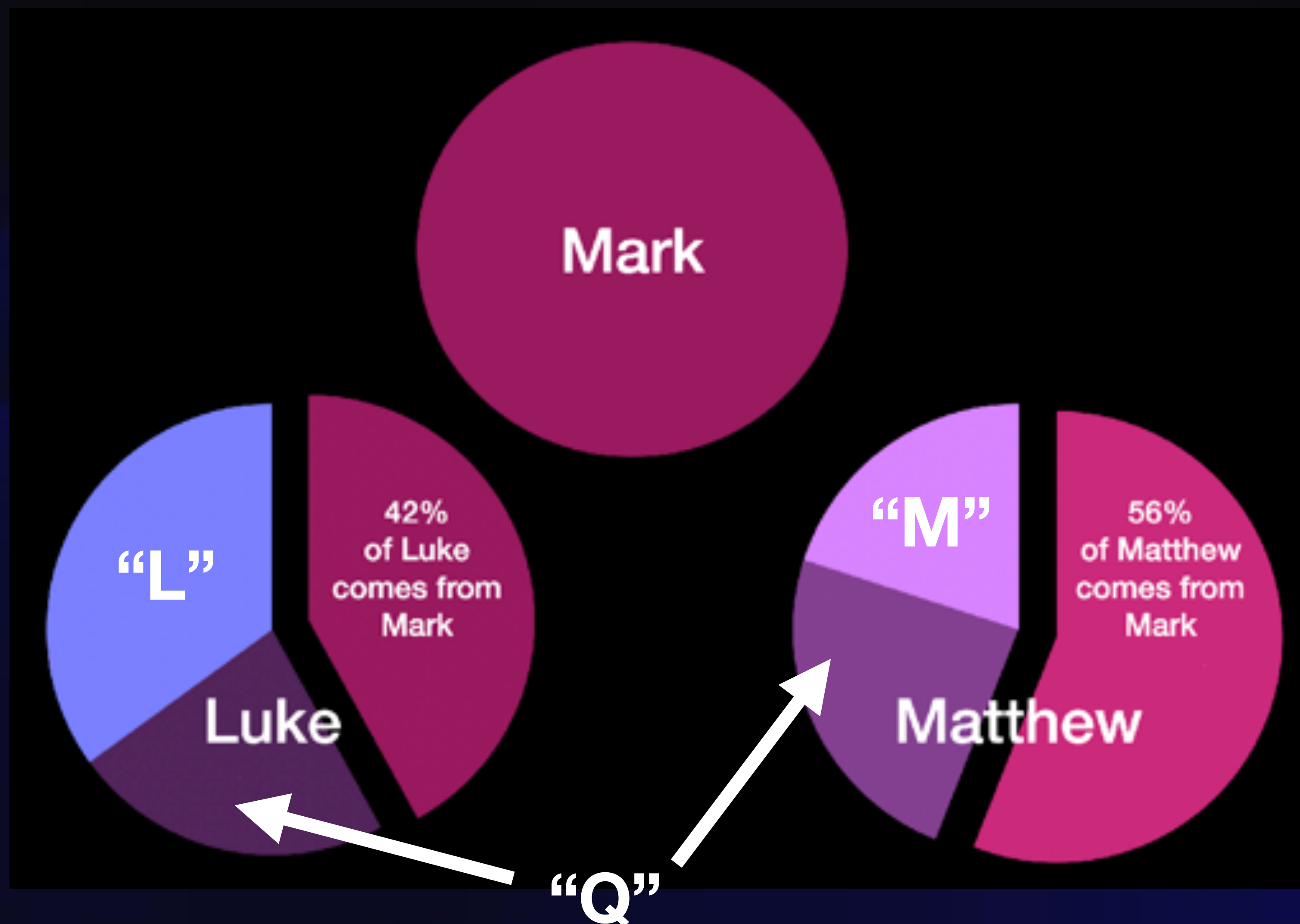
2 ἐδίδασκεν...πολλά Mt 13.34; Mk 4.33-34

Mt 11.15; 13.43; Mk 4.23; Lk 14.35; Re 2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6, 13, 22

9 Ὅς...ἀκουέτω



**source theory** —identifying the literary sources that Matthew, Luke, and Thomas (!) drew upon...



**redaction criticism** — the redaction critic's purpose is to avoid being distracted by the redactor's edits. The sole purpose is to recover Jesus' original words and intention. The goal was to liberate the parable from its literary setting.

X	X	X
<p>Matt. 13:11 • AA</p> <p>he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Let anyone with ears listen!"</p>	<p>Mark 4:1 • AA</p> <p>to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"</p>	<p>Luke 8:4 • AA</p> <p>Luke 8:5 "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. 6 Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. 7 Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. 8 Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"</p>

## form criticism — assumptions

- individual units of tradition circulated in oral form
- the gospel writers were primarily *collectors* of those individual units (pericopae)
- the pericope was the basic unit of meaning, embodying “the gospel in a nutshell”

## methodology

- what is the “form” (genre) of the unit? — parable
- recover the original words Jesus was likely to have spoken
- investigate the *sitz im leben* in which Jesus spoke the parable
- determine how Jesus addressed that *sitz im leben*?

C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935)

Jesus was “thinking aloud about the fortunes of his work in Galilee.” The lost seeds are the “dramatic machinery of the story, not to be interpreted symbolically.... No farmer despairs because of such inevitable waste of labor and seed: it is to be expected; in spite of all, he may have an excellent harvest.”

Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (1947)

the harvest “symbolizes the eschatological overflowing of the divine fullness, surpassing all human measure.... In spite of every failure and opposition, from hopeless beginnings, God brings forth the triumphant end which he had promised.”

this is how Biblical scholarship was practiced by scholars  
and taught to theological students  
into the 1970's and beyond

alternatives to the historical critical method  
*began* to emerge in the mid-70's and 80's

Bruce Metzger, Donald Juel  
and intercalation

illustrating how the approaches differ



## Mark's **interpretation** of the Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:14-20

### **form criticism**

This is Mark's own interpretation. These words are not authentic to Jesus and should be disregarded.

<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? <sup>14</sup> The sower sows the word.

<sup>15</sup> These are the ones **on the path** where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

<sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown **on rocky ground**: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

<sup>18</sup> And others are those sown **among the thorns**: these are the ones who hear the word, <sup>19</sup> but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing.

<sup>20</sup> And these are the ones sown **on the good soil**: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

## Mark's **interpretation** of the Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:14-20

### narrative criticism

This is an (obviously) useful insight into Mark's narrative intentions and into the meaning of his story.

<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? <sup>14</sup> The sower sows the word.

<sup>15</sup> These are the ones **on the path** where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

<sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown **on rocky ground**: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

<sup>18</sup> And others are those sown **among the thorns**: these are the ones who hear the word, <sup>19</sup> but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing.

<sup>20</sup> And these are the ones sown **on the good soil**: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

## Mark's **interpretation** of the Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:14-20

### narrative criticism

This is an (obviously) useful insight into Mark's narrative intentions and into the meaning of his story.

How does this passage, Mark 4:14-20, fit into the entire Markan narrative?

- Does it move the **plot** forward?
- Does it contribute to the **characterization** of any of the story's characters?
- Are there **narrative threads** here found elsewhere in Mark's story?

## Mark's **interpretation** of the Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:14-20

### **narrative criticism**

This is an (obviously) useful insight into Mark's narrative intentions and into the meaning of his story.

<sup>15</sup> These are the ones **on the path** where the word is sown: when they hear, **Satan** immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

**Satan** is a character in the story

- Satan tempts Jesus, but Jesus overcomes the temptation. (Mark 1:13)
- When Peter is horrified at the thought Jesus must suffer, be rejected, and be killed, Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." (Mark 8:33)

## Mark's **interpretation** of the Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:14-20

### narrative criticism

This is an (obviously) useful insight into Mark's narrative intentions and into the meaning of his story.

<sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown **on rocky ground**: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they **fall away**.

immediately they **fall away** - σκανδαλίζονται (σκανδαλίζω)

- And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters (σκανδαλισθήσεσθε) ...” (Mark 14:27)
- Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters (σκανδαλισθήσονται), I will not.” (Mark 14:29)

## Mark's **interpretation** of the Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:14-20

### narrative criticism

This is an (obviously) useful insight into Mark's narrative intentions and into the meaning of his story.

<sup>18</sup> And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word,  
<sup>19</sup> but the **cares of the world**, and the **lure of wealth**, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing.

worldly cares, the lure of wealth

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. (Mk. 10:23)

a roadmap to the rise and fall of the disciples

and a cautionary tale for would be church leaders in Mark's day

## summarizing the assumptions of narrative criticism...

- the gospel writers were narrative artists (not just collectors of beloved pericopae)
- the basic unit of meaning is the story-as-a-whole
- the gospels can productively be read and interpreted as story
- categories like plot, characterization, and rhetorical structure yield important clues
- rather than being “windows” into a history behind the text, they “project a world”
- questions of historicity can be bracketed (did this really happen? did Jesus really say that?)
- bottom line: how did the author want to affect the implied reader?
- narrative texts are ambiguous by nature and validly open to alternative readings



a (less-than positive) perspective on narrative criticism

“The study of the gospels as literature misrepresents and/or avoids the intent of the writings...”

Mike

two non-canonical portraits of Jesus

# Gospel of Thomas

# the Gospel of Thomas

- appears to be a random collection of 114 sayings with no apparent order
- not ordered into a story — there is no plot
- includes 16 parables, 13 of which are found in other gospels
- no mention of traditional doctrinal themes such as crucifixion, resurrection, final judgment, messianic understanding of Jesus
- the kingdom of God is already present but hidden from most
- repeated calls to “seek and find” divine **knowledge** (*gnosis*).

They asked him: When is the Kingdom coming?  
He replied: it is not coming in an easily observable manner.

People will not be saying,  
“Look, it’s over here” or “Look, it’s over there.”

Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is already spread out on the earth,  
and people aren’t aware of it.

The Gospel of Thomas, Saying 113

They asked him: When is the Kingdom coming?  
He replied: it is not coming in an easily observable manner.

People will not be saying,  
“Look, it’s over here” or “Look, it’s over there.”

Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is already spread out on the earth,  
and people aren’t aware of it.

The Gospel of Thomas, Saying 113

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”

Luke 17:20-21

They said to him: Tell us who you are so that we can believe in you.  
He replied: You analyze the appearance of the sky and the earth,  
but you don't recognize what is right in front of you,  
and you don't know the nature of the present time.

Jesus said: Seek and you will find.

He said: In the past I did not answer the questions you asked.  
Now I am willing to answer, but you do not ask.

Jesus said: Do not give holy things to dogs,  
for they might carry them off to the dung heap.  
Do not give pearls to pigs, for they might...

Jesus said: Whoever seeks will find.  
Whoever knocks, it will be opened.

The Gospel of Thomas, Sayings 91-94

They said to him: Tell us who you are so that we can believe in you.  
He replied: You analyze the appearance of the sky and the earth,  
but you don't recognize what is right in front of you,  
and you don't know the nature of the present time.

Jesus said: Seek and you will find.  
He said: In the past I did not answer the questions you asked.  
Now I am willing to answer, but you do not ask.

Jesus said: Do not give holy things to dogs,  
for they might carry them off to the dung heap.  
Do not give pearls to pigs, for they might...

Jesus said: Whoever seeks will find.  
Whoever knocks, it will be opened.

Gospel of Thomas, Sayings 91-94

Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you. Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matthew 7:6-8



# Infancy Gospel of Thomas

mid-late 2nd century

This child Jesus, when five years old, was playing in the ford of a mountain stream; and He collected the flowing waters into pools, and made them clear immediately, and by a word alone He made them obey Him. And having made some soft clay, He fashioned out of it twelve sparrows.

And it was the Sabbath when He did these things. And there were also many other children playing with Him. And a certain Jew, seeing what Jesus was doing, playing on the Sabbath, went off immediately, and said to his father Joseph: Behold, your son is at the stream, and has taken clay, and made of it twelve birds, and has profaned the Sabbath. And Joseph, coming to the place and seeing, cried out to Him, saying: Why do you do on the Sabbath what it is not lawful to do?

And Jesus clapped His hands, and cried out to the sparrows, and said to them: Off you go! And the sparrows flew, and went off crying. And the Jews seeing this were amazed, and went away and reported to their chief men what they had seen Jesus doing.

Infancy Gospel of Thomas, chapter 2

After that He was again passing through the village; and a boy ran up against Him, and struck His shoulder. And Jesus was angry, and said to him: You shall not go back the way you came. And immediately he fell down dead.

And some who saw what had taken place, said: Whence was this child begotten, that every word of his is certainly accomplished? And the parents of the dead boy went away to Joseph, and blamed him, saying: Since you have such a child, it is impossible for you to live with us in the village; or else teach him to bless, and not to curse: for he is killing our children.

Infancy Gospel of Thomas, chapter 4

Who was the historical Jesus?

- A. a zealous Messianic revolutionary
- B. a charismatic mystic
- C. a liberal pacifist
- D. a prophetic rabbi and ethical teacher
- E. a divine Savior

Who was the historical Jesus?

- A. a zealous Messianic revolutionary - Mark
- B. a charismatic mystic - Thomas
- C. a liberal pacifist
- D. a prophetic rabbi and ethical teacher - Matthew
- E. a divine Savior - John

# from Jesus to Christ

the development of New Testament Christology

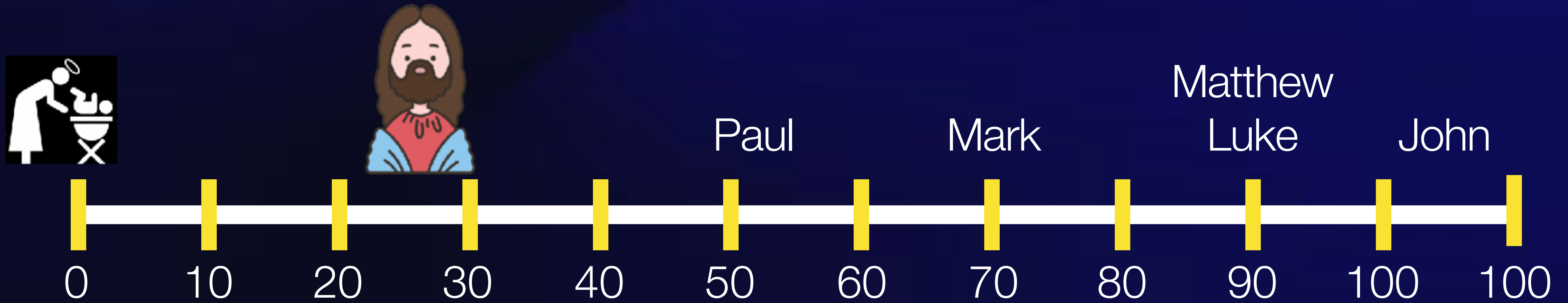
# from Jesus to Christ

the development of New Testament Christology



# from Jesus to Christ

the development of New Testament Christology





Paul — c. 56 CE

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was **declared to be Son of God** with power according to the spirit of holiness by **resurrection** from the dead...

Romans 1:1-4



Mark — c. 70 CE

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was **baptized** by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “**You are my Son, the Beloved**; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark 1:9-11

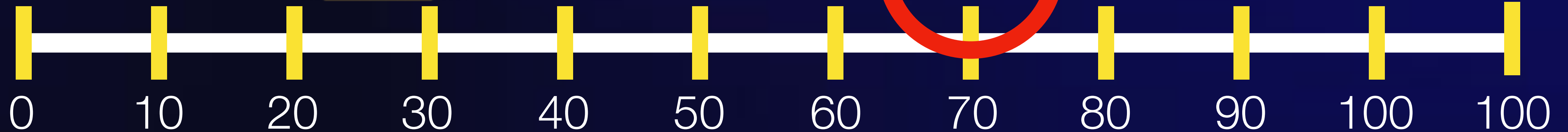


Paul

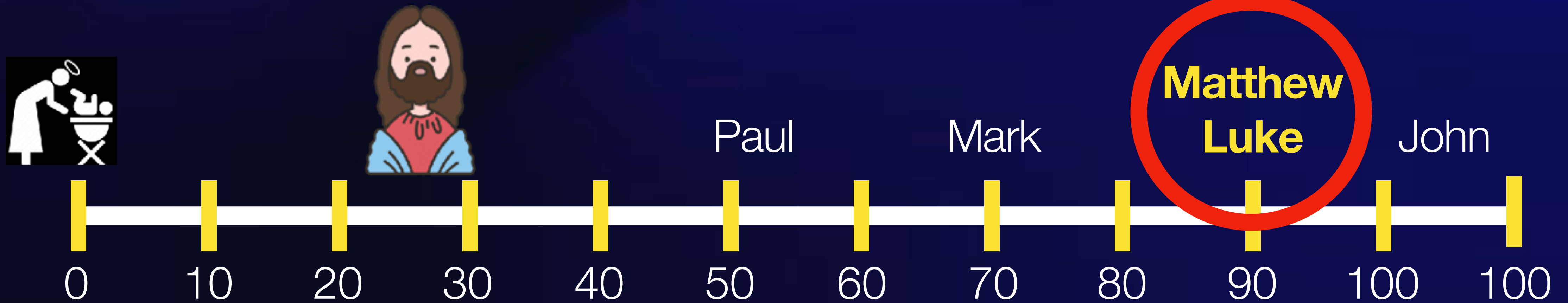
**Mark**

Matthew  
Luke

John



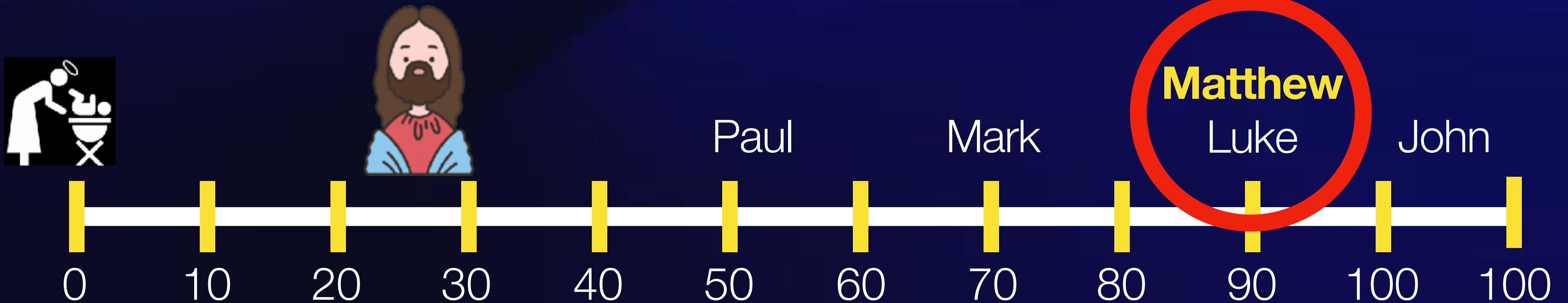
No birth narratives, or accounts of a **virgin birth**, appear in the tradition until sixty years after Jesus' lifetime.



Matthew— c. 90 CE

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for **the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.**”

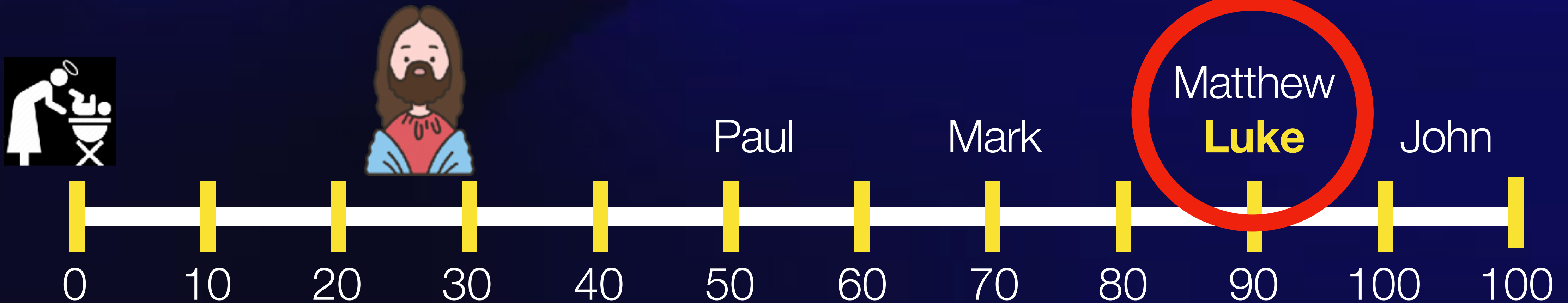
Matthew 1:20



Luke — c. 90 CE

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, **you will conceive in your womb** and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the **Son of the Most High**, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

Luke 1:30-32

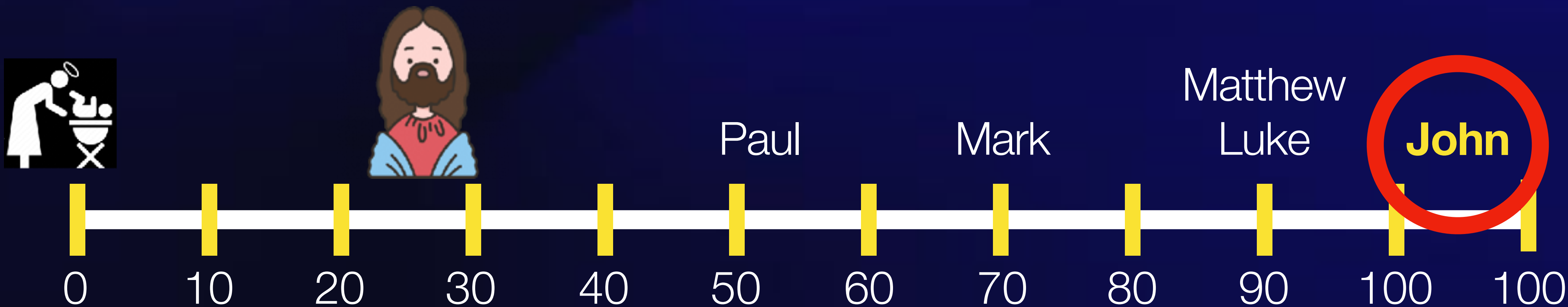


John — c. 100 CE

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was **in the beginning** with God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of **a father's only son**...

John 1:1-2, 14



declared Son of God  
at his resurrection

56



Paul

Mark

Matthew

Luke

John

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 100

called beloved Son  
at his baptism  
**70**

declared Son of God  
at his resurrection



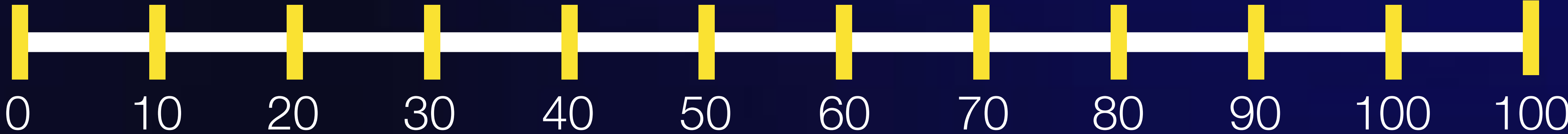
Paul

**Mark**

Matthew

Luke

John





called Son of the Most High  
at his **conception**  
**90**

called beloved Son  
at his baptism

declared Son of God  
at his resurrection

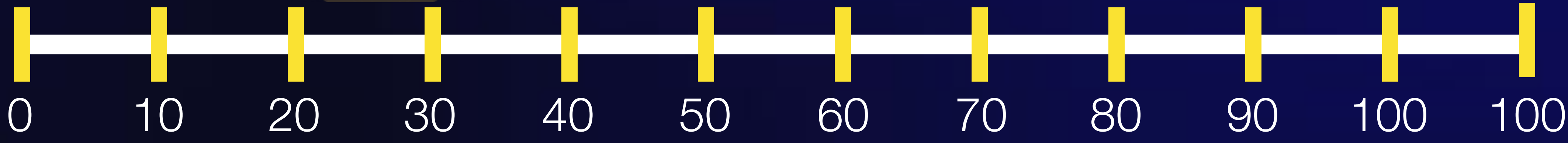


Paul

Mark

**Matthew**  
**Luke**

John



called the only Son  
since the **beginning of time**  
**100**

called Son of the Most High  
at his conception

called beloved Son  
at his baptism

declared Son of God  
at his resurrection



Paul

Mark

Matthew

Luke

**John**



As the years passed after Jesus' lifetime, the church's remembrance of Jesus became more and more exalted.

called the only Son since the beginning of time

**100**

called Son of the Most High at his conception

**90**

called beloved Son at his baptism

**70**

declared Son of God at his resurrection

**56**



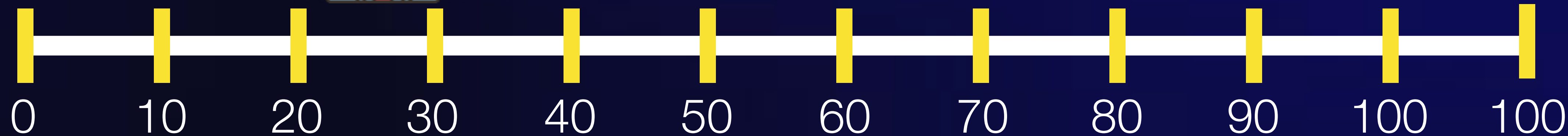
Paul

Mark

Matthew

Luke

John



the four gospels and the death of Jesus

## Matthew

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Matthew 27:50-52

## Mark

Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Mark 15:37-39

## Luke

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.

Luke 23:46-48

## John

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:28-30

# Mark: the tearing of the heavens

## Mark

Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was **torn in two**, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the **Son of God!**"

Mark 15:37-39

# Mark: the tearing of the heavens

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the **heavens torn apart** and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "**You are my Son**, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1:9-11

## Mark

Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was **torn in two**, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the **Son of God!**"

Mark 15:37-39

# Luke: the repentant crowds

## Luke

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.” And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, **beating their breasts** (τύπτω).

Luke 23:46-48



# Luke: the repentant crowds

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was **beating his breast** and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

Luke 18:13

## Luke

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, **beating their breasts.**

Luke 23:46-48

# Matthew: the earth shakes

## Matthew

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The **earth shook** (σειώ), and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Matthew 27:50-52

# Matthew: the earth shakes

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was **in turmoil** (σειώ), asking, “Who is this?”

Matthew 21:10

## Matthew

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The **earth shook** (σειώ), and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Matthew 27:50-52

# John: I lay down my life

## John

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and **gave up his spirit**.

John 19:28-30

# John: I lay down my life

And **I lay down my life** for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because **I lay down my life** in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but **I lay it down** of my own accord. I have power to **lay it down**, and I have power to **take it up** again.

John 10:15-18

## John

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and **gave up his spirit**.

John 19:28-30

the penultimate slide

what are you taking away from this class?

what are you curious about exploring?



the ultimate slide

what does it mean  
that we have four stories of Jesus?