PARABOLIC OVERTURES

- 1. Where do you experience overtures?
 - a. What comprises an overture?
 - b. What is the purpose of an overture?
- 2. How would you describe a parable?
- 3. What is a parable's purpose?
- 4. Think about a parable that you've read in the gospels
- a. What are the "events" of the story?
- b. What is the story saying to its audience?
- c. Does the story lose meaning if the events are not literal history?
- 5. Which has greater meaning: historical fact or parable?

MATTHEW AND LUKE'S BIRTH NARRATIVES

- 1. Recall from memory the elements of Jesus' birth narratives
- 2. List each according to their authors
- 3. Discuss the differences between the two narratives
- 4. Consider what may be the themes for each Gospel



Next week: Matthew's Parable

Homework:

Read Matthew 1-2

Discover the number of times the following are mentioned, and earn a star for the day!

- ____ Women in the genealogy
- ____ Messiah
- ____ Dreams
- ____ Bethleham
- ____ Old Testament passages

Read also: Exodus 1 – 2:10





 $\begin{array}{c} OVERTURES \text{ from The}(\text{Holy}) G \text{HOSTS} \\ \text{of } C \text{HRISTMAS} \text{ Past, Present, & Future} \end{array}$

SESSION ONE "The Cosmic Clash"

MATTHEW AND LUKE'S CIRCUMSTANCES:

- 1. Their Gospels were written sometime in the 80s and 90s \mbox{CE} .
 - a. Paul's letters were written 3 to 4 decades prior.
 - b. Mark Gospel was written around 70 CE.
 - c. Writers of Matthew and Luke were not alive during Jesus lifetime.
 - d. Neither Paul nor Mark make any mention of Jesus birth, nor does John's gospel, but all claim Jesus as the son of God, both human and divine.
- 2. The Roman Empire is now on its 11th Emperor.
 - a. Christianity has flourished through Emperors Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.
 - b. Intense persecution of Christians begins with Nero 54-68 CE.
 - c. After Nero, Rome goes through three emperors in one year, ending with Vespasian, who rules 69-79 CE.
 - d. During Vespasian's rule, Jerusalem is destroyed by his son and general: Titus.
 - e. After a two-year reign of Titus, his brother Domitian murders him and takes over the throne ruling from 81CE to 96CE, most likely when these two gospels are written.
 - f. Domitian's government exhibits strong authoritarian characteristics. Religious, military, and cultural propaganda fosters a cult of personality, and by nominating himself as perpetual censor, he seeks to control public and private morals.
 - g. Emperor Domitian is characterized as a ruthless but efficient autocrat.

Matthew and Luke's Circumstances (con't):

- 3. Life for Christians under Emperor Domitian
 - a. Christians refuse to worship the emperor or other deities, which goes against the Roman Empire's polytheistic beliefs and is seen as a threat to the Roman Empire's social cohesion.
 - b. Domitian uses Christians as scapegoats for societal issues or to divert attention from internal problems; sometimes charged with treason, child murder, incest, magic, or illegal assembly.
 - e. Domitian believes that the Roman Empire should be governed as a divine monarchy with himself as the benevolent despot.
 - f. This is the situation and these are the circumstances into which Matthew and Luke write their stories of Jesus.
 - g. Their mission: to reveal Jesus as the TRUE Son of God, the TRUE Prince of Peace, and the reign of the Kingdom of God over and against the Caesars and the Roman Empire.

Take a few moments to imagine Matthew's and Luke's motivations

JESUS'S CIRCUMSTANCES:

It is 20 BCE. For centuries Greeks and Romans rule over the nations surrounding the Fertile Crescent. Since 44 BCE Greece, Italy, and North Africa, have all been united under the reign of Gaius Octavius (a.k.a.Octavian), the first emperor of the newly formed Roman Empire. Gaius Octavius now rules the known world as Caesar Augustus. Caesar Augustus is not only Rome's first Emperor, but is the bringer of peace and son of the god, Apollo, and descended from the goddess Venus. The Romans are quickly amassing power, and expanding their rule into what is now Europe, all the way to the British Isles. The Roman style of leadership, when conquering, is to install the local wealthy elites as heads of local government. These new leaders are responsible for governing their people, collecting taxes for Rome and maintaining peace — by whatever means necessary.

This is the world in which the Jews are living in the first centuries BCE-CE. Their daily struggle is under oppressive occupation. The Emperor has chosen the wealthy Jewish Herod family to rule Judea. King Herod the Great is vicious and violent, and means to ingratiate himself to Caesar. He executes his own wives, sons, and sons in law in order to maintain his position as king. He appoints, deposes, and murders high priests all for the sake of maintaining power. He designs a golden statue of an eagle (the symbol of Rome) to hang over the main entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem. Around 4 BCE two Jewish teachers and 40 students tear down the statue and smash it. They are arrested, tried, and put to death by fire. This is the Herod who slaughters the infants of Bethlehem in orderbto kill the newborn King, Jesus.

Herod dies shortly thereafter. His son, Herod Archelaus rules from 4 BCE–6 CE (Matthew 2:22). He is besieged by a revolt of up to 3000 citizens because of the Golden Eagle massacre. Archelaus has them all massacred. A rebellion, led by Judas of Galilee, attacks Herod's capital and home, the city of Sepphoris, just 4 miles north of Nazareth. Roman Governor Quintilius Varus responds by sending troops to crush the revolt, burning the city, effectively destroying it and selling its inhabitants into slavery (Luke 13:1) sparking the formation of the Zealots.

Archelaus' brother, Herod Antipas rebuilds and fortifies Sepphoris. This reconstruction takes place during Jesus' youth, and may have employed his father, Joseph, a carptenter.

After 10 years of violent rule, Archelaus is removed and the territory of Judea is put directly under Roman rule and under the Governor Quirinius. Jesus is probably around 10 years old at this time.

The official census, found in Luke 2, instituted by Quirinius, governor of Roman Syria, causes more tensions and leads to a second uprising by the same Jewish rebel, Judas of Galilee, (6 CE). The revolt is sparked because the census will result in the imposition of more taxes. Judas and Zadok, a Pharisee, equate the taxes to slavery and encourage Jews not to register for the census. He and his followers target those Jews who do register. The Zealot revolt leads to 64 years of violence, famine, murder, and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Jesus, his human family, his disciples and friends do not live in a vacuum. This the situation into which Jesus is born; a Jewish life of oppression, set within the Roman empirical system and within constant revolt against it.

They are desperate for a Messiah. But what kind of Messiah are they seeking, human or transcendent, violent or nonviolent? Their common core messianic understanding is as a warrior king, as the Romans continue to persecute them. They are looking for a king like the great King David, who was a future and forever king, violent and victorious. Jesus proves to be something completely unexpected.

<u>Future, forever, violent</u> Psalm 2	OR	<u>Future, forever, restorer, peaceful, with justice and righteousess</u> Amos 9:11
Psalm 89		Isaiah 9:7; 16:5 Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15

COSMIC CLASH-CAESAR AUGUSTUS: See insert

Share your thoughts about the political, economic, military, and social situations into which Jesus is born.