

Jesus of Nazareth

co-written and directed by Franco Zeffirelli

Study Guide for Hour One

There are two Nativity accounts in the New Testament - one written by Matthew and one written by Luke. There is precious little information about Mary elsewhere in the New Testament. John mentions her, unnamed, only twice. Mark presents a terse and somewhat critical account of her. What we know of the Nativity comes from Matthew and Luke.

You will get the most out of Jesus of Nazareth, both devotionally and educationally, if you read Matthew and Luke's Nativity accounts first, and then watch it with your Bibles open and before you. Both Nativity accounts are primarily concerned to present Jesus as conceived of the Holy Spirit so that he could be proclaimed the Son of God. Beyond this, they are dissimilar. Zeffirelli attempts, very successfully, to conflate and harmonize them. His is probably the best attempt at this. He will need to attempt it again in the Resurrection accounts, of which there are three.

For instance, if you follow along in your Bibles, you will see that:

Minutes 1-12 are from Luke

Minutes 13-15 are from Matthew

Minutes 15-21 are from Luke

Minutes 21-30 are from Matthew, etc., etc.

Because the Nativity accounts are short and sketchy (Luke's is more expansive than Matthew's), Zeffirelli provides dialogue for the sake of dramatization. It is all perfectly plausible and realistic. He takes but a very few excursions from accuracy. One is at minute 59. The Magi don't warn Joseph to flee from Herod; his dream does. By and large Zeffirelli is highly accurate.

Some questions for consideration:

What do you believe about the different perspectives that Matthew and Luke present on the Nativity accounts?

Zeffirelli refrains from overt presentations of miracles. Rather, divine intervention is subtle and ambiguous. For example, the archangel Gabriel does not appear in person, nor does the angelic host. Do you find this appealing or disturbing?

What are the strengths of Zeffirelli's portrayal of the Nativity accounts? What are the weaknesses?

Watch on!