

So then what happened?

A sermon outline for the first Sunday after Christmas

- I. After the story of the birth, what about the next thirty years?
 1. The flight into Egypt (Matt 2:12-23). At twelve in the temple (Luke 2:39-52).
 2. What about his childhood, schooling, etc.? What about Joseph and even more about Mary?
 3. The Infancy Gospels. There are many fragments of such materials. For example, the Gospel of James (about 170 A.D), including claims of Mary's perpetual virginity.
 4. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas (about 150 or later). In this Gospel the boy Jesus carries water on top of a cloth. In another text his father, the carpenter, is making a wooden bed, and Jesus stretches a board that is too short. In another text Jesus and his friends are making clay birds and Jesus' birds become alive and fly away. (This story is also in the Koran.) There is much in this Gospel that is disturbing. Jesus is portrayed sometimes as nasty and petulant. Playmates that oppose him die, and he later raises them from the dead. He puts down his teachers.
- II. Why are we concerned about these things?
 1. Two reasons.
 - a. On the one hand, they are tantalizing and "interesting." Dubious matters of idle curiosity.
 - b. On the other hand, we want to be "in the know," to pry because then we have power. We know things. We are in control.
 2. Behind all this is a misunderstanding of what kind of literature a "gospel" is. A misunderstanding of the genre of "gospel."
 - a. A gospel is not a biography, not a history, not a newspaper account of events. Archeologists have discovered over 200 gospels and many fragments of such materials. With the invention of paper made out of wood (around 1800), thousands of lives of Jesus were produced. (Before that paper was made out of linen.)
 - b. The early Christians understood that the end was coming in their lifetime. No need for a written record. I Thessalonians 4:17: "then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord." I Cor 15:51-52: "Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." Paul uses "sleep" as a metaphor for death.
 - c. Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." As Martin Dibelius famously said (1921): "In the beginning it was preaching." The gospel is proclamation, sermonic.
- III. "The devil's in the details."—But in a different sense than is usually meant. The devil uses our interest in the details to distract us from the big picture, the main thing, the point of it all.
 1. The gospels are like tadpoles. The big thing, the main thing, is the passion story, and the material before the passion story, the tail, is mainly to set the setting.
 2. The main thing is the proclamation of the gospel. 1 Cor 1:21: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."

3. In some manger scenes the star of Bethlehem shines in the sky like a cross over the manger, pointing below to the Christ child and pointing ahead to the main thing: the cross and resurrection.
4. Therefore, 1 Cor 2:2: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."
5. This is where forgiveness begins.
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