

THE NAME OF JESUS IN MATTHEW 28

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Abstract

The Easter narrative of Matthew 28, unlike those of Luke and John, does not refer to the Risen One as 'Lord.' Unlike Luke 24, it does not name him as 'the Son of Man.' While once naming him as Son (in the baptismal formula), Matthew 28 five times calls him 'Jesus.' This is the personal name which the evangelist explained in his opening chapter, the name which held together the teaching, healing, and other activity of Jesus' ministry, and which unifies the final Easter chapter. Up to Chapter 27, Matthew has cited the Scriptures to illuminate the ministry of Jesus. Now the Scriptures fall silent; the risen Jesus speaks for himself, the divine Emmanuel who accompanies the Church on her universal mission.

Keywords: Christ; Jesus; Lord; Resurrection; Scripture; The Son; The Son of Man

The final chapter of Matthew's Gospel is devoted to the resurrection and its immediate aftermath—most importantly, in the discovery of the empty tomb and two appearances of the Risen One. Matthew five times calls Jesus by the name he received at birth, 'Jesus' (Mt 28: 5, 9–10, 16, 18) and, in a formula of baptism, introduces him once as 'the Son' (28:19). It is only in these two ways that Matthew names the resurrected Christ in the closing chapter of his Gospel. The Easter narratives of other Gospels include Christological titles: 'Lord', 'Christ', 'the Living One', and 'Son of Man.'

Luke names the Risen One not only as 'Jesus' (24:3, 15, 19) but also by the titles 'Lord' (Lk 24:3, 34), 'Christ' (24:26, 46), and the Living

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One (24:5).¹ Luke also recalls the words of Jesus about his destiny as ‘the Son of Man’ who will be crucified and resurrected (Lk 24:7).²

Mark’s chapter on the resurrection (Mk 16:1–8), which both Matthew and Luke seem to have used,³ is brief, in fact easily the briefest of all four Easter narratives in the Gospels. It speaks only of ‘Jesus’ (16:6), and does not refer to ‘the Son,’ ‘Lord,’ ‘Christ,’ ‘the Son of Man,’ or the ‘Living One.’

In its two closing Easter chapters, John’s Gospel calls the Risen One not only ‘Jesus’ (20:2, 12, 14–16, 19, 24, 26, 30–31; 21:1, 4bis, 5, 7, 10, 12–15, 20–23, 25) but also ‘Lord’ (20:2, 13, 15, 18, 20, 25, 28; 21:7bis, 12, 15–17, 20–21), ‘the Christ’ (20:31), ‘the Son of God’ (20:31), ‘God’ (20:28), and ‘Teacher’ (20:16). Thus ‘Jesus’ enjoys 25 occurrences and ‘Lord’ 15 occurrences, whereas four other titles are used once each. John joins Matthew in privileging ‘Jesus,’ but differs from him by introducing ‘Lord,’ ‘Christ,’ ‘God,’ and ‘Teacher.’

This examination of the naming of the Risen One in the Easter narratives of the four Gospels brings up questions for Matthew. Why does he not introduce ‘Lord’ (as Luke does twice and John 15 times), ‘Christ’ (as Luke does twice and John once), or ‘the Son of Man’ (as Luke does once)? How do we account for Matthew’s use of ‘the Son’? And, above all, why does he show an overwhelming preference for the name of ‘Jesus’? Why does he decline quoting Scriptural passages to illuminate events in his Easter narrative? The naming of the Risen One in Matthew 28 raises at least these questions.

Why not ‘Lord (Kurios)’ in Matthew 28?

Matthew 3:3 prepares the coming of Jesus with the words of Isaiah 40:3 (‘make straight the way of the Lord’). Towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the evangelist has Jesus apply to himself the same title: ‘not everyone who says to me “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt 7:21; see 7:22). Jesus will name himself as

¹On reasons for reading ‘*tou kuriou Iēsou* (the Lord Jesus)’ in Luke 24.3, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, New York: American Bible Society; 2nd edn, 1994, 156–57. François Bovon agrees with this reading: *Luke*, vol. 3, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, 349; that Luke used Mark, see, 345–46.

²On recalling Jesus’s past words which predict the destiny of the Son of Man, see Bovon, *Luke*, vol. 3, 351. Bovon remarks that ‘Luke loves to repeat basic truths, but he also knows how to vary the expressions’ (p. 395). We could recognize this practice at work in the five different ways with which Luke names the Risen Jesus; on ‘the Living One’ as a title (Luke 24:5; see Bovon, *Luke*, vol. 3, 350).

³ That Matthew follows Mark’s account, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew*, vol. 3, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005, 591–93; Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 475.

'the Lord of the Sabbath', the divinely appointed day for rest and the worship of God (Mt 12:8).

Thus, from early in his Gospel, Matthew reaches for 'Lord' as a name or title for Jesus. That usage could prepare the way for introducing 'Lord' in the final, Easter chapter. But Matthew does not match Luke and John by naming the Risen One in that way. Matthew 28 refers only to 'Jesus' and, apart from the baptismal formula, never introduces any other title to say, for instance, 'I know that you are looking for the Lord who was crucified?' (28:5; see 1 Cor 2:8). Or, "the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where the Lord had told them to meet him" (28:16).

By the time Matthew's Gospel took its final form, most likely after AD 70, the language of 'Lord' for the crucified and risen Jesus had become commonplace among Christians (e.g., 1 Cor 2:8, and 'the Lord Jesus Christ' in the opening greetings of Paul's letters). Paul did not pause to justify using the same title in formulaic expressions about God raising 'Jesus our Lord' (Rom 4:24) or raising 'the Lord Jesus' (2 Cor 4:14). He and his readers took that language for granted (see 1 Cor 16:22). Why then did Matthew refer throughout his Easter chapter to 'Jesus', and so decline to join Luke, John, and Paul in using the title of Lord for the crucified and risen Jesus?

John Nolland remarks: "in one way or another there is a strong shared Christian impulse to see that after Jesus' death and resurrection everything is different."⁴ That impulse is reflected by Luke and John, for instance, when applying 'Lord' to Jesus in their Easter chapters. This title has already appeared in the body of their Gospels, but it is now charged with the high meaning we find in 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Philippians 2:11.⁵ The introduction of 'Lord' alerts readers to "a new level of authority" that would "suitably mark the achievement of the cross and resurrection."⁶

Why then does Matthew fail to introduce 'Lord' and persists with the historical name of 'Jesus'? This is a question, raised by few if any commentators on the First Gospel, apart, seemingly, from Ulrich Luz.⁷ Perhaps Matthew thought that the divine 'Lordship' of Christ had been sufficiently expounded and supported in the body of the Gospel. More importantly, use of the title 'Lord' in Chapter 28 could

⁴J. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 1264.

⁵See G. O'Collins, 'Does Philippians 2:6–11 present Christ as a superior angel', *The Expository Times*, forthcoming.

⁶Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1264.

⁷Luz, *Matthew*, vol. 3, 634–44.

distract from the evangelist's desire to highlight the historical name of Jesus in his Easter narrative.

Why not 'Christ (Christos) in Matthew 28?

The situation is similar with 'Christ', a title for an anointed one (a 'messiah'), above a kingly leader and liberator who 'is to come'. Right from the start of his Gospel, Matthew shows how he is at home with this title (1:1, 16, 17, 18). Later 'you are the Messiah' will form a key element in the confession made by Peter, the leader of the Twelve (16:16, 20).

In the passion story the charge of falsely claiming to be the Messiah sent by God bulks large (26:63, 68) as it does when Pilate sentences Jesus to die (27:17, 22). The cross itself bears an inscription declaring that Jesus has falsely claimed to be the Messianic king of the Jews (27:37).

But, far from stating explicitly that the resurrection has vindicated the messianic claims of Jesus or in other ways following Luke and John in declaring Jesus to be 'the Christ', Matthew avoids this language altogether in his Easter chapter. Such 'Christ-language' could undermine Matthew's concentration on 'Jesus'.

Why not 'the Son of Man' in Matthew 28?

We also need to ask: why does Matthew 28 not match Luke by recalling the earthly Jesus' 'prophetic' words, which concern his coming destiny as the crucified and risen Son of Man? After all, Jesus three times predicts a crucifixion and resurrection for the Son of Man (Mt 16:21–28; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). Matthew introduces the term *ho uios tou anthropou* 30 times, Luke 25 times, Mark 14 times, and John 12 times. But Matthew declines to speak of the Son of Man in the Easter chapter and to adopt, specifically, the prediction/fulfilment scheme we find in Luke 24:7: "remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Like other exegetes, Nolland spends time on *allusions* allegedly made in Matthew 28 to 'one like unto a son of man' who 'was given [universal] dominion' in Daniel 7:13–14.⁸ But if Matthew understands the authority of the risen Jesus to be that of the Son of Man, why does

⁸Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1264. On allusions in Matt 28:16–20 to Dan 7:13–14 (and other OT texts), see also W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew*, vol. 3, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997, 678–79, 683, 688; and on allusions to Daniel, see also Evans, *Matthew*, 476, 483, 484.

he not explicitly introduce the title and have the angel of the Lord say to the three women, for instance, 'I know that you seek the Son of Man who was crucified'? Jesus has foretold his coming death and resurrection precisely in terms of what 'the Son of Man' will experience. Why then does Matthew's resurrection account fail to include an *explicit reference* to the risen state of the Son of Man, and his universal authority and power supporting the world mission of the disciples?

Davies and Allison comment on Matthew's practice of citing and interpreting the Scriptures: Matthew 28:16–20 "reflects the author's penchant for trumpeting scriptural fulfilment."⁹ Beyond question, that penchant is found exemplified right through this Gospel, above all, in the ten 'fulfilment quotations': from the fulfilment of the 'promise' of a virginal conception (1:22–23) until the statement about Judas, the chief priests, and the elders 'fulfilling' the Scriptures when Judas returns the thirty pieces of silver and they buy a burial place for foreigners (27:9–10). But in the final chapter the trumpet falls silent. Neither Matthew 28:16–20 nor any other passage in his entire Easter chapter quotes explicitly any Old Testament texts, let alone trumpets the proposal that Jesus fulfills the promise of the Danielic 'one like unto a son of man.'¹⁰

From Chapter 1 to Chapter 27 of Matthew, the biblical language about divine sonship, the suffering servant, the Son of Man, and much else from the Jewish Scriptures has interpreted what Jesus does, says, and suffers. Now in Chapter 28 that scriptural witness falls silent, and Jesus speaks for himself to two women, to the eleven disciples on the mountain, and through them to the community of his faithful.

It may be that Matthew was more deterred than Luke by the fact that 'the Son of Man' did not enter early Christian proclamation, as had 'Lord,' 'Christ (Messiah),' and 'Son of God.' An unusual, even enigmatic expression, 'the Son of Man' conveyed a somewhat bewildering range of meanings: from a circumlocution for the

⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, vol. 3, 688.

¹⁰ M. Eugene Boring observes that Matthew contains 'considerably more quotations [of the Scriptures] and allusions [to the Scriptures] than any of the other Gospels' ('Matthew', *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8, Nashville: Abingdon, 1995, 151). There are 40 scriptural quotations indicated as such in the text, and 21 further, direct quotations identified as such by the latest (1993) Nestle-Aland Greek text of the New Testament, making a total of 61 direct citations of the Scriptures in Matthew. After Mt 27:46, no more citations occur. On the question of biblical *allusions*, judgments vary greatly: Nestle-Aland recognize 294 in Matthew's Gospel, whereas only 30 occur in the list provided by the American Bible Society.

speaker (“the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,” Mt 8:20; “the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hand of sinners,” Mt 26:45) to a title for the divine Judge appearing in glory at the end of history (Mt 24:30; 25:31; 26:64). ‘The Son of Man’ did not promise to be an effective title with which to round off a gospel.

‘The Son’ in Matthew 28

The opening words of Matthew’s Gospel twice mention sonship: “an account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah (Christ), the son of David, the son of Abraham” (1:1). The flight into Egypt touches on the divine sonship by ‘fulfilling’ in the person of Jesus rather than in the people of God the biblical/divine statement, “out of Egypt I have called my son” (2:15). At the baptism of Jesus “the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted” on Jesus, while “a voice from heaven said: ‘This is my Son the Beloved with whom I am well pleased’” (3:16–17).

Jesus ‘will baptize’ people ‘with the Holy Spirit and fire’ (3:11). Here readers naturally think of Jesus’ promise about his followers being baptized by the Spirit (Acts 1:5) and the ‘tongues of fire’ descending at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). But in the Gospel of Matthew itself, baptism with the Spirit will enter the final commission to baptize ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (28:19). It is Jesus’ relationship with the Father (Abba), proclaimed at the baptism, that recurs frequently in Matthew. When commissioning the Twelve for a proclamation that will lead to persecution, Jesus promises, not that the Spirit will speak in them, but that ‘the Spirit of your Father will speak in you’ (Mt 10:20).

The Sermon on the Mount highlights the heavenly Father’s loving care for all his creatures (Mt 5:45; 6:26; see 10:29–31). Jesus’ followers are taught a prayer which they can pray to the Father with radical trust (Mt 6:9–13). In what has been called ‘a bolt from the Johannine blue,’ Jesus expresses the unique, mutual knowledge that exists between Father and Son: “All things have been handed over me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11:27). Those who do the will of their heavenly Father become Jesus’ brothers, sisters, and mother in his new family (Mt 12:46–50).

In the company of Elijah, the prophetic precursor of the Messiah, and Moses, the mediator of the law to Israel, Jesus was gloriously transfigured on a mountain in the presence of Peter, James, and his brother John (Mt 17:1–8). The voice of the Father echoed what had

been said at the baptism of Jesus and added the command to obey Jesus: 'from the cloud a voice said, "this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him"' (Mt 17:5).

With startling brevity and high significance, Matthew 28 hints at the new family of the heavenly Father that has come into being through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The 'angel of the Lord' has already sent a message to the (eleven male) 'disciples' who are to keep a rendezvous in Galilee with their teacher, the risen Jesus (28:7, 8). Then Jesus unexpectedly appears to Mary Magdalene and her companion and says: "go and tell my *brothers* to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (28:10). Peter, James, John and other eight men who, after the defection of Judas, now make up the group of eleven, are no longer merely called disciples. They are also 'brothers' of Jesus in the final family of God; it is implied, in the light of 12:46–50, that Mary Magdalene and her companion are sisters in that same, new family of the heavenly Father.

The two women's brief encounter with the risen Jesus (Mt 28:9–10) also serves to stress further the importance of his coming appearance to the eleven male disciples on the mountain in Galilee. Not only an angel of the Lord but also the risen Jesus himself announces that imminent rendezvous with his disciples, who have now been confirmed as his brothers. No other post-resurrection appearance in any of the four Gospels has been three times announced in advance (Mt 26:32; 28:7, 10). Such repetition adds weight to the significance of that final appearance.

No Title but the Name Jesus Gathers all together

The final appearance of the risen 'Jesus' (Matt 28:16–20) gathers Matthew's Gospel into unity by its location: a *mountain* in Galilee that recalls the 'very high mountain' of the third temptation Jesus faced from the devil (Mt 4:8); the mountain of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1; 8:1); 'the high mountain' of the transfiguration (Mt 17:1, 9); and Mount Sinai from which came Moses' teaching of the divine Law. The final appearance of Jesus on a mountain top brings to a close a gospel that has often located his activity on mountains (see also 4:8; 14:23; and 15:29).

The commission to 'make disciples of *all nations*' evokes Abraham the ancestor of Jesus (Mt 1:2, 17), in whom 'all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen 12:3).¹¹ The command to *baptize* 'in the

¹¹'All nations' includes and does not exclude Israel; see Evans, *Matthew*, 484, fn. 602. Boring comments that, whereas it takes the first half of Acts to describe the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' invites readers to remember the trinitarian revelation introduced by the baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13–17).

The promise 'I am with you always' (Mt 28:20) brings readers back to Jesus-*Emmanuel*, the 'God with us' (Isa 7:14) who figures in the divine revelation conveyed to Joseph (Mt 1:23). Right through his life and ministry (e.g., 10:40; 13:37; 14:22–33; 18:5, 20), Jesus has already shown himself to be God with us. This abiding presence in the family of believers will continue, albeit invisibly, 'to the end of the age' (Mt 28:20). Matthew has just given an example of what the presence will mean, when Jesus meets the two women (28:9–10): they "are already en route on their mission when they are joined by the risen Christ, a paradigm of the reassuring presence of the risen Christ in the missionary activity of the church."¹²

These closing elements in Matthew 28 (which involve the name of 'Jesus') create a variegated *inclusion* that holds together the beginning and the end of the Gospel of Matthew. But the way in which, apart from the 'Son' and his founding the new family of God through baptism, the closing chapter uses only the name of 'Jesus' suggests that this name (already used frequently from the start of the Gospel) expresses the final, unifying factor for the Church now launched on mission.

Matthew places the name of 'Jesus' in the opening words of his Gospel (1:1) and uses it four more times in the first chapter.¹³ The name belongs notably to the instruction conveyed by the angel to Joseph: "she [Mary] will bear a son and you shall give him the name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). No other Gospel takes time out to explain the name that Jesus bore. In Chapter 28 that name is also used five times and, significantly, to introduce the closing words of Jesus (28:18). Overall there are 149 occurrences in Matthew of the name of Jesus; it holds together the way of Christian life described in the Gospel. Mark 1–16:8 introduces the name of Jesus 80 times; Luke 1–24 includes 84 occurrences of the name, and John 1–21 includes 235 occurrences.

'process' of creating 'a universal, inclusive community,' Matthew concentrates it 'in one scene' ("Matthew," 503).

¹²Boring, "Matthew," 500.

¹³While most probably not intentional, the five occurrences of 'Jesus' in the opening chapter of Matthew match the five occurrences in the closing chapter.

Scriptures no Longer Cited

In Chapter 28 explicit citations of the Scriptures and their fulfilment no longer figure in Matthew's text. Jesus, to whom those sacred texts point, has taken over their role. The missionary Church is to teach all nations 'everything that I have commanded you' (Mt 28:20). The 'everything' obviously includes five large blocks of material: Matthew 5:1–7:29 (which ends by saying that 'he taught as one having authority'; see 28:18); 10:5–42; 13:1–58; 18:1–35; 25:1–46). Obviously 'everything that I have commanded you' includes other discourses. It also 'summarizes Jesus' ministry as a whole,'¹⁴ and thus covers, for instance, his healing activity.

Jesus has proved through his words and deeds 'the authoritative bringer of revelation,' the new Moses who, through his words and deeds, exercised his lordship, which is now established as universal ('all nations') and cosmic ('in heaven and on earth'), with his Church becoming 'a [universal] extension of his ministry.'¹⁵ 'Jesus,' the name chosen for him by God, holds together the final chapter, no less than the entire story that Matthew has told. The key, unifying significance of 'Jesus' for Matthew 1–28, as well as for Matthew 28, should not be overlooked.

Conclusions

The Easter narrative of Matthew 28, unlike the Easter narratives of Luke and John, does not refer to the Risen Jesus as 'Lord' and 'Christ'. Unlike Luke 24:7, it does not name him as 'Son of Man'. While once (in a baptismal formula) calling Jesus 'the Son', Matthew 28 appeals to him five times by his personal name 'Jesus'. The name not only holds together the final chapter but also unifies the story of Jesus' teaching, healing, and other activities in his ministry. Up to and including Chapter 27, Matthew has cited the Scriptures to illuminate the birth, ministry, and passion of Jesus. Now in the Easter chapter the Scriptures fall silent. Jesus himself acts and speaks, the divine Emmanuel who accompanies the Church on her universal mission.

¹⁴Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, vol. 3, 678.

¹⁵Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, vol. 3, 686.