

**Portraits of Jesus  
Close Reading Analysis Paper**

**Due: September 21 11 AM in class and on Sakai**

**Choose one of the following passages for your paper:**

John 20:1-23

Luke 12:13-34

Matthew 1:1-2:6

Mark 8:27-9:9

Mark 15:21-16:8

*I have selected these passages because they reflect some of the broader themes we have discussed thus far in the course. If you would like to write on another passage, please consult with me to receive approval for the passage no later than Friday September 18.*

The purpose of this assignment is to practice analyzing and interpreting evidence. Quotations are evidence, but what you intend for the reader to understand from them is never self-evident. You must explain to the reader your interpretation of any passage that you quote. A close reading is an opportunity to focus only on this particular skill, which you will need to incorporate into your later argumentative paper and take-home exams.

Begin your assignment with an **analysis of the passage** you have chosen. Go through line by line. Your overall assignment is to examine how this passage portrays Jesus, and what this passage *means*, especially in its context as an *ancient* piece of literature.

Consider the following questions and prompts in writing your paper. (You do not need to answer all of them; these are provided to get you started.)

- Look closely at the language, allusions, and theme(s) of the passage. For example, you might note the repetition of certain words and the importance that those repeated words hold for the passage. Or you might notice striking symbolism or metaphors, or an important tone to the style.
- Comment on the significance of your selected excerpt in its larger textual context. Ask: what is the passage's relationship to the passages directly before and after it? does the passage begin the text or end the text? does it come at a key moment in the narrative? Write about how this placement affects the meaning of the text and the portrait of Jesus being drawn in the text.
- Consider how the excerpt relates to other themes in the larger text (such as Judaism, what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, Christology, etc.)
- Compare and contrast the representation of Jesus in this passage to other passages either in other parts of your text or in other texts we have read.
- What is the connection between the passage and biblical quotes inside the passage? What do the quotes do? (The Harper Collins Study Bible will tell you where in the Hebrew Bible/Christian Old Testament the quotes come from.)
- How does your interpretation of the passage engage with Fredriksen's arguments, and how might Fredriksen's analysis of the Gospels help your interpretations?

This paper is not about personal feelings or personal opinions regarding the passage. It is a

critical analysis. (So the paper expresses your opinion to the extent it is an interpretation, but it is an interpretation that is grounded in analysis. It is a series of miniature reasoned arguments, not an emotional response.)

A close reading is primarily an exercise on the details of a passage, so you will want to avoid generalized statements about Christianity or the New Testament. Avoid summarizing the passage or quoting at length from the passage. You will want to quote individual words or phrases to help locate your points.

This paper is a close analysis, not an overarching argumentative paper. The paper does not need a thesis, an introduction, or a conclusion. Just jump right into the analysis! The paper should be organized with coherent paragraphs, however.

The mechanics:

- Use only the NRSV or RSV translation for the paper
- Provide the citation of your passage at the top of the first page of your paper
- The assignment should be 600-800 words, typed, double-spaced, and paginated
- Put the word count at end of the paper.
- Put only your id # on the paper, not your name. I grade them anonymously.
- Since I know the passage about which you are writing, you do not need to continue to provide a citation throughout the paper when you analyze your passage.
- If you refer to or quote other passages in your Gospel, the New Testament, or the Christian Old Testament, then please provide a citation in parenthesis (e.g., Mark 3:2)
- If you discuss Fredriksen, please provide a parenthetical citation of the author and page #.
- Please conduct no additional research for your paper.

The assignment will be graded on the following criteria:

- Depth and complexity of analysis and insight
- Clarity of writing
- Accuracy, insofar as you can be expected to know something based on readings, lectures, and discussion. (For example, writing that Jewish priests sacrificed animals in the Jerusalem Temple in 100 CE would be considered inaccurate. The different interpretations provided by students in class about the parable of the sower are not “inaccurate,” nor are the different interpretations of the angel’s response to Mary in Luke, because those interpretations were all based on a close reading of the language and/or historical context of the passage.)
- Organization, and engagement with issues raised in lecture, discussion, and the readings.
- Do pay attention to spelling titles and names correctly

*See the course syllabus for policies on extensions, late papers, and plagiarism/academic integrity.*

**Good luck and enjoy!!!!**



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