



Fall Term 2026
Portraits of Jesus (Biblical Studies 180)
LTh Course Syllabus
New Testament Gospels and Their Communities

Huron University College Land Acknowledgment

Huron is situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron, and Lenape peoples, whose sharing and stewardship of the land has been governed by the Dish with One Spoon treaty since time immemorial. We are guided by this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. Huron University College acknowledges its past role in perpetuating colonial and exclusionary relations. Because religious and ecclesial institutions were instrumental in such relations, we consider it our particular responsibility as a Faculty of Theology to work towards justice and reconciliation.

Course Dates: September 10, 17, 24 and October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
Time: Thursday, from 7 – 9 P.M. (CT), 8 – 10 P.M. (ET)
Delivery: Hosted via Zoom
Instructor: Rev. Dr. Amanda C. Miller, PhD, MDiv, BME
Contact: amandasmithmiller@gmail.com
647-446-1578 (for urgent situations)

Course Description

This course will examine the four Gospels of the New Testament, specifically how they portray Jesus and the significance of the early Jesus movement for each of their individual communities. We will consider the historical “world behind the text,” the literary “world within the text,” and our own lived experiences as the “world in front of the text,” with an eye to understanding how we can follow Jesus more faithfully and responsibly today.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the social, historical, political, economic, and religious context of first-century Palestine and the Roman Empire
2. Apply this contextual knowledge to the Gospel narratives in order to develop a deeper understanding of the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the experience of the early Christian communities writing and reading the Gospels
3. Identify key events, themes, and features of each of the Gospels, and their differences from and similarities to one another
4. Experience and analyze diverse portrayals of Jesus (both in the biblical text and in their interpretation over the past two millennia) and allow them to enrich both our understandings of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth and our personal spiritual journeys
5. Discern and communicate how the insight gained from the above objectives offers wisdom to the social, spiritual, political, and economic issues of the contemporary world, 21st century faith communities, and your personal spirituality

Required Texts

Students are asked to buy 1–2 of the books noted below, and excerpts of the others would be scanned and shared as PDFs and provided on the ChurchX class webpage.

1. *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*, Intermountain Press, 2021.
2. Mitzi J. Smith and Yung Suk Kim, *Toward Decentering the New Testament: A Reintroduction*, Cascade Books, 2018.
3. John T. Carroll, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2016
4. Other readings may be shared as PDF documents or links to online articles

Course Outline/Plan

Week 1: Portraits of Jesus in the Ancient World and Today

- Getting to know one another and our course topic
- Images of Jesus slideshow + discussion
- Introduction to the first-century Mediterranean world

Week 2: Historical Context of the First Century

- Journal Reflection #1 due
- Roman Empire in the first century Mediterranean world
- Judaism in the first century Mediterranean world
- Introduction to the Historical Character Project

Week 3: Exploring the Relationship between Different Gospels

- Historical Character Projects due + discussion with the class
- The Synoptic Relationship and the Gospel of John
- A taste of the *Gospel of Thomas*

Week 4: Gospel of Mark

- Journal Reflection #2 due
- Gospel of Mark overview and community context clues
- Mark + parallels deep dive: healings, exorcisms, and miracle stories

Week 5: Gospel of Luke

- Journal Reflection #3 due
- Gospel of Luke overview and community context clues
- Luke + parallels deep dive: birth narratives and parables

Week 6: Gospel of Matthew

- Journal Reflection #4 due
- Gospel of Matthew overview and community context clues
- Matthew + parallels deep dive: teachings, conflict narratives, and apocalypticism

Week 7: Gospel of John

- Journal Reflection #5 due
- Gospel of John overview and community context clues
- John + parallels deep dive: trial, crucifixion, and resurrection narratives

Week 8: Final Projects and Final Reflections

- Sharing of final projects with the class
- Final course “lectio divina” reflections

Method of Evaluation and Criteria for Grading

(only for students choosing to be evaluated for full course credit)

1. Class Engagement/Participation – 20%
 - a. Scholarship of teaching and learning shows that we learn best when we are actively engaging with one another and the course material, so my pedagogical style is very conversational. That means your individual contributions and perspective will be particularly important to the learning experience! This includes participating in class, doing your assignments and readings and sharing your insights and questions about them, working well with your co-learners, and having a positive attitude. A good sense of curiosity and respect for others will help create a safe environment for our discussions.
2. Journal of Reading Reflections – 20%
 - a. You will complete a reading reflection journal with 5 total entries over the course of our 8 weeks together. I design the reflection question prompts to guide our readings and prepare you well for class discussion topics, so it is important to complete them before the start of each class meeting, and to have your reflections available to reference during class.
3. Historical Character Project – 20%
 - a. Based on our overview of the culture and history of the first-century Mediterranean world, you will choose a character from the Gospels—either a specific character or a member of a particular social group (such as a day laborer, a midwife, or a centurion). For this paper, you will use our historical knowledge and your sacred imagination to sketch out the lived experience of your character, as much as possible. You will also choose a Gospel passage and reflect on how your character might have understood, interpreted, or experienced this event/teaching, based on their sociocultural context and lived experience.
 - b. More detailed instructions and grading rubric can be found on CHURCHx.
 - c. Due at our class meeting for Week 3.
4. Final Creative Project – 40%
 - a. You will select a Gospel passage or theme that you would like to interpret for a faith community that you are a part of. Through our course research topics and thoughtful reflection, you will prepare a paper about the meaning of the passage and how it connects with your chosen community. This will be the foundation for the application portion of the project, where you put your insight into conversation with “the social, spiritual, political, and economic issues of the contemporary world and its faith communities” (course outcome #5). It can take many forms, as long as it is a meaningful, thoughtful interpretation of the text for your community. You may choose to write a sermon, plan a Bible study or youth group session, write a song or create a piece of art, or design a worship service, to name just a few options. My hope is that you create something that

connects with your vocational gifts and could even be used in your current setting!

- b. More detailed instructions and grading rubric can be found on CHURCHx.
- c. You get to share your good work with the rest of the class at our final meeting.

Huron Grade Descriptors

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

Student Code of Conduct

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work, and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at:

<https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf>.

Statement on the Recording of Class Activities

Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

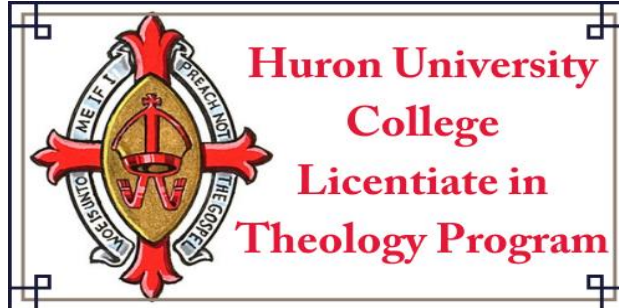
Online courses within the Licentiate in Theology Program are recorded for student engagement purposes. These recordings are only used by the registered students of the class and made available through a restricted video hosting site to respect both privacy and intellectual property. Should a student be uncomfortable with this practice, they can contact the course instructor or the LTh Program Director, Dr. Grayhame Bowcott at grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca

Statement of Prohibition on the Use of AI

As the primary purpose of Huron's Licentiate in Theology Program is to enable critical thinking, spiritual growth, the cultivation of individual ministry skillsets, and personal discernment for future ministry leadership, this means that we expect our students to offer up only their own ideas and original contributions of writing, assignments, and evaluative content. Any and all use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) is strictly prohibited within this program. Any student who violates this prohibition will be disqualified from receiving credit for the course they are taking. Any student who repeatedly violates this prohibition may risk expulsion from the LTh Program.

Support Services

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should contact the LTh Coordinator, Chris Travers, at chris.travers@huron.uwo.ca



THIS COURSE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HURON'S FACULTY OF THEOLOGY COMMITTEE
FOR THE FALL TERM OF THE LTH PROGRAM, 2026.