What kind of texts are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Modern readers tend to approach the Gospels primarily as sources of biography for the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, but ancient and medieval readers saw in them something rather different. History, but also revelation. This course takes readers on a journey from the origins of the Gospels in oral storytelling through their basis in the ancient Temple tradition of prophecy to their patristic and medieval reading as a quaternity all pointing to the Majesty of the Lord. We will read commentaries by Origen, Bede, Rupert of Deutz, and Hildegard of Bingen to discover the way in which their reading of the Gospels was informed by their experience of liturgy and prayer, as well as the way in which the Gospels themselves informed their vision of Jesus as Christ. Course requirements will include writing model commentaries on the texts as well as the opportunity to create works of art (music, images, architectural plans). There will also be a final research paper on a particular commentator or theme.
BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT THE SEMINARY CO-OP BOOKSTORE


COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is designed as a research colloquium, meaning a seminar intended to help you develop questions and gather materials for your research. The study of the Gospels crosses multiple academic disciplines, including history, theology, musicology, art history, literature, literary criticism, philosophy, philology, religious studies, rhetoric, media studies, and more. Each of these fields has its own methods and theories of inquiry, often at odds with each other in their evaluation of the stories the Gospels tell. One of the main goals of this course is to make you aware of these differences by reading comparatively across different analytical modes.

Surprisingly, given the importance of the Gospels throughout the history of Christianity, their interpretation and use in the early Middle Ages (roughly, through the early twelfth century, prior to the birth of scholasticism) is relatively understudied, and/or simply subsumed into the history of biblical commentary more generally. This is the more surprising given the centrality of devotion to Christ in his humanity that developed during the later Middle Ages and on which the Reformers including Luther based their criticisms of the way the scriptures had been read. To test our own assumptions about the way in which the Gospels “ought” to be read, we need to take seriously this earlier tradition, while at the same time becoming mindful of the way our assumptions shape the arguments that we make both about the history of Christianity and the meaning of Christ.

Given the exploratory nature of our quest, the main requirement for the quarter is careful reading and participation in our discussions. Additional practice assignments will be given as the scope of our inquiry develops, with the goal for the quarter of producing a
substantial proposal for future research. This proposal should take the form of a final paper (12-15 pages, double-spaced, with bibliography), due December 8 by 11:59pm, on Canvas.

READING AND DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS

September 28 The Triumph of Jesus in a White Nightie

Examples—pick two to present and analyze in class
Franco Zeffirelli, Jesus of Nazareth (1977)

October 5 How to read the Scriptures
Mitchell, Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics


October 12 The Oral and Written Gospels
Kelber, Mark’s Story of Jesus

October 19 “In the beginning was the Word”
Origen, Commentary on the Gospel of John, Introduction and Books 1-2, trans. Heine, pp. 3-157


**October 26 Bede, the Four Fathers, and the Temple Tradition**


**November 2 The Heliand in Majesty**

*The Heliand*, trans. Murphy


**November 9 Dreaming the Word**


**November 16 “And I saw…”**


**November 23 THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS**

**November 30 The Poetry of the Word**

Esolen, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, pp. xvii-xxvii, 1-42, 87-122