

Introduction

Gospel of Matthew



The Gospel According to Matthew

Early World	Patriarchs	Egypt & Exodus	Desert Wanderings	Conquest & Judges	Royal Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Messianic Fulfillment	The Church

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Gospel of Matthew Introductory Material

Apostolic Authorship

A curious feature of the four canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—is that none of them are signed. Many other works written roughly the same time but not accepted by the Church as divinely inspired make explicit claims to authorship by famous persons, such as the so-called “Gospel of Nicodemus” or the “Gospel of Thomas.” The Greek title *Kata Matthaion* (According to Matthew) was given to the first Gospel by the early Church. Some readers get nervous when they learn this, assuming that the Church has no idea whether the four Gospels included in the New Testament actually were written by their attributed authors. Signatures were unneeded on these Gospels because the Christian community preserved the memory of the author of each of the canonical Gospels and afforded special honor to these four Evangelists. In the same way, the community preserved the awareness that, whatever the name on the label said, the alleged “Gospel of Nicodemus” was fraudulent. The verification of Matthew’s Gospel, as of all the canonical Gospels, was based on the testimony of the apostles and the entire Christian community. Attribution of this Gospel to the apostle Matthew was unanimous within the ancient Church.

This attribution is remarkable precisely because the Evangelist Matthew isn’t a particularly notable character in Scripture. Very little is known of him except that he also went by the name “Levi” (*Mk* 2:14 and *Lk* 5:27) and that he once worked as a tax collector before he was called by Jesus (*Mt* 9:9). From this, scholars speculate that he may have been a scribe. Many scribes used their literacy skills to work as tax collectors or publicans. Scripture records that Matthew once held a great feast for Jesus (*Lk* 5:29) and that he became one of Jesus’ disciples (*Mt* 10:2-3). Finally, it’s known that Matthew was present at Pentecost (*Acts* 1:13). Beyond this, he’s utterly obscure. It’s highly unlikely that the Church would fix on Matthew as the author of the first Gospel unless he is indeed its author.

Since the rise of the historical-critical method of biblical criticism, it’s become commonplace to fudge the apostolic authorship of Matthew by saying that the ancients understood authorship

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differently than contemporary readers. This theory holds that followers or the “school” of a particular writer could produce works that then could be attributed to the writer himself. Scholars who subscribe to this thinking assert that the Gospel of Matthew is the work of a “Matthean community” and not directly written by Matthew’s hand.

Church teaching is clear about the authorship of the Gospels, and *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation from the Second Vatican Council, specifically states that these four biblical books were written by apostles or by men directly associated with the apostles. Traditional opinion holds that two of the Evangelists—Matthew and John—were apostles. Mark traveled as St. Peter’s companion, and Luke was a companion of St. Paul’s. The Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church, echoes an unbroken tradition that goes back to the Church Fathers of the early 2nd century.

Date of Composition

Matthew’s Gospel is the first of the three synoptic Gospels (the other two are Mark and Luke). “Synoptic” means “seen with one eye.” These three Gospels long have been noted for their remarkable similarities, not only with respect to the events reported but even in the very language used to report them. On the basis of this similarity, some Scripture scholars argue that Matthew used the Gospel of Mark and another document called “Q” (from *quelle*, the German word for “source”) as sources when he composed his Gospel. A difficulty arises because accepting this theory would mean accepting that Matthew, an eyewitness to the events of Jesus’ life recorded in the Gospel attributed to him, relied on the writings of a non-eyewitness. Numerous patristic writers (for example, Sts. Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Jerome) argue that Matthew recorded the earliest Gospel, that he did so in Hebrew or the closely related language of Aramaic, and that his work later was translated into Greek. Evidence strongly indicates that the Gospel of Mark originally was written in Greek. Textual analysis confirms that there is indeed an underlying Hebrew basis for sayings found in Matthew, many of which contain puns that are only intelligible in Hebrew. In fact, St. Jerome writes that he saw a Hebrew text of Matthew’s Gospel in the library at Caesarea. Early sects preserved the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew under the title “According to the Hebrews.”

Other scholars, taking for granted the assumption that Matthew’s Gospel is dependant on Mark’s Gospel, argue that the Gospel of Matthew therefore was written well after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Generally, the rationale for this argument is that Matthew records Jesus clearly prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem. The assumption here is that true prophecy doesn’t ever occur, so Matthew must be placing this “prophecy” into the mouth of Jesus after the event. The problem with this theory is that neither Matthew’s Gospel nor any other Gospel clearly describes the destruction of the Temple as an event that has occurred. If the Gospel writers could have done this, they most certainly would have.

The entire thrust of the New Testament is that the Old Covenant has passed away and the New Covenant has arrived. There are endless arguments to the effect that circumcision no longer is required, that the Levitical priesthood no longer is necessary, that animal sacrifices must give way to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Not one of the Gospel writers claims: “See! We told you!”

This surely is because none of them were writing after the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In his Gospel, Matthew takes particular pains to point out occasion after occasion where prophecy is fulfilled. His mysterious silence in the case of the destruction of the Temple is best explained by assuming that, when Matthew composed his Gospel, the prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem hadn't yet been fulfilled. This idea gains greater force when readers note that other documents known to have been written after the destruction of the Temple do indeed refer back to that event as "Exhibit A." The fulfillment of the prophesied destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem was a strong argument used against the Judaizers in the early Church who demanded conformity to the Levitical system as a prerequisite for becoming a Christian.

According to the unanimous testimony of the early Church Fathers, the beginning book of the New Testament was written by the apostle Matthew in Hebrew or Aramaic sometime between 50 and 70 A.D. and was translated into Greek by some unknown person or persons shortly thereafter. The apostolic origin of this Gospel repeatedly has been confirmed by the Church.

Jewish-Christian Audience

Textural and patristic evidence indicates that Matthew's Gospel primarily was addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience living in Judea. Matthew assumes that his readers will be familiar with Jewish customs, and he makes little effort to explain their meaning. Mark, on the other hand, is believed to have been writing his Gospel to Roman Gentiles. Matthew quotes many more passages from the Old Testament than do the writers of the other three Gospels. One of the principal burdens of Matthew's mission is to prove that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of messianic prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptures. Matthew also is attempting to show that Jesus is the author of the new and final covenant that all the previous Old Testament covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David anticipate. There are more than a hundred references to the Old Testament in Matthew's Gospel, and they range from direct quotations to paraphrasing to allusions. Many of these are taken from the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) and a few come directly from the deuterocanonical books (those found only in the Catholic Bible, which is based on the Septuagint). The bulk of the Old Testament Scripture references in Matthew's Gospel come from the collection of books that are included in both the modern canon of Hebrew Scriptures and the Protestant Old Testament. One example is the famous "Immanuel" prophecy found in Isaiah 7:14. One of the most notable of the allusions from the deuterocanonical books is found in Matthew's account of the crucifixion (*Mt 27:41-43*), which very clearly appears linked to the inspired account of the sufferings of the "just righteous man" in Wisdom 2:12-20.

Significance of Geography in Matthew's Gospel

In Jesus' day, Israel was divided into three areas—Galilee in the far north, Samaria in the central region, and Judea in the extreme south. The entire region was about the size of the state of New Jersey. In his Gospel, Matthew is interested in the Messiah's restoration of the descendants of all 12 tribes of Israel and not just the salvation of the inhabitants of Judea living in and around Jerusalem. The Jews primarily are descendants of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Matthew's Gospel, however, focuses a great deal of attention on Jesus' activities in Galilee, where many descendants of the other 10 tribes of Israel still lived.

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This can be confusing to readers who mistakenly assume that the words “Jew” and “Israelite” are synonymous. In the course of their long history, the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel were joined as part of a single kingdom only very briefly for a period of about 80 years during the reigns of David and Solomon. After that, civil war split the kingdom. Descendants of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the southern kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as their capital. Descendants of the 10 remaining tribes formed the northern kingdom of Israel. In 722 B.C., the northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians, who deported and dispersed the inhabitants among the Gentiles. These descendants of the northern kingdom sometimes are referred to as the “10 lost tribes of Israel.”

Only the kingdom of Judah survived, but not without its inhabitants also undergoing a period of deportation known as the Babylonian Captivity. A Jew is a person who practices the religion of Judaism, which developed after the Babylonian Captivity. The term “Jew” historically has been applied to members of the surviving tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The word “Israelite” is used to refer to descendants of all 12 of the tribes of Israel. Jews in Jesus’ own day referred to the descendants of any of the 12 tribes of Israel living in Galilee as “Israelites.” The vast majority of the Israelites living in Galilee were descended from the 10 tribes who originally had inhabited the northern kingdom of Israel.

The long-awaited Messiah was prophesied to come from the house of David and the tribe of Judah. Despite the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel, God had promised to restore the descendants of all 12 tribes of Israel. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah wrote: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (*Jer* 31:31). God’s intention is clear to include the lost and dispersed tribes of the northern kingdom in his New Covenant.

Just how God plans to do that greatly interests Matthew. In Matthew 4:12-16, the Evangelist records Isaiah’s famous prophecy to the “land of Zebulun and Naphtali,” two of the lost tribes of the northern kingdom. Matthew also devotes a great deal of time focusing on Jesus’ activities in “Galilee of the Gentiles,” the geographical region formerly occupied by the northern kingdom. Matthew’s aim is to show that God is beginning his work of restoring the descendants of all 12 tribes of Israel in the exact location where the catastrophic deportation of the northern kingdom had taken place.

Form and Basic Theme

The principal theme of Matthew’s Gospel is fulfillment of the Old Covenant. Jesus explains this himself: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” (*Mt* 5:17). Matthew is intensely interested in Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham, Moses, and David. Matthew’s Gospel focuses on how Jesus’ new law fulfills and completes the old. The covenant of circumcision with Abraham gives way to the covenant of Baptism in Jesus Christ; the blood sacrifices of Moses give way to the Eucharistic sacrifice of Jesus Christ; and the ruins of David’s kingdom are now restored in a new and spiritual kingdom governed by the son of David who is the true king of the Jews. The Church repeatedly is contrasted with earthly Israel. The disciples function as a sort of cabinet of

royal ministers, and Peter's prime-ministerial authority in the Church is drawn directly from Old Testament imagery: "And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (*Isa 22:22*). Peter is the "Rock" upon which the new Temple of the Church is founded.

The Gospel of Matthew, because it's written to Christians of Jewish background, models itself on the Pentateuch, or the Law of Moses found in the first five books of the Old Testament. Matthew's Gospel also can be divided into five main sections, or "books." Jesus is portrayed as a new Moses ascending a new mountain to deliver his New Covenant (*Mt 5:1-7:29*). These five "books" are bracketed between a prologue and a conclusion that act as bookends. Each of the five "books" consists of a narrative section recounting the acts and miracles, followed by a sermon or discourse by Jesus. This alternation of narrative and discourse highlights the relationship between Jesus' words and his works.

Only Matthew's Gospel explicitly mentions the Church: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (*Mt 16:18*). The Evangelist's overarching theme is that the Church is Jesus' kingdom of heaven on earth, and his focus is on preserving Jesus' teaching and guarantee of the Church's stability throughout history.

Outline of the Gospel of Matthew

- 1. Prologue Narratives (1:1—2:23)**
 - A. Genealogy (1:1-17)
 - B. Infancy Narrative (1:18—2:23)
- 2. Book One (3:1—7:29)**
 - A. Narrative: Ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus (3:1—4:25)
 - B. Discourse: Sermon on the Mount (5:1—7:29)
- 3. Book Two (8:1—10:42)**
 - A. Narrative: Miracles of Jesus (8:1—9:38)
 - B. Discourse: Missionary Sermon (10:1-42)
- 4. Book Three (11:1—13:58)**
 - A. Narrative: Confrontation of an Evil Generation (11:1—12:50)
 - B. Discourse: Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven (13:1-58)
- 5. Book Four—Instructions to Peter and the Apostles (14:1—18:35)**
 - A. Narrative: Travels and Miracles (14:1—17:27)
 - B. Discourse: Sermon about the Church (18:1-35)
- 6. Book Five—Teaching in Judea and Jerusalem (19:1—25:46)**
 - A. Narrative: Events in Judea and Jesus' Teaching in the Temple (19:1—23:39)
 - B. Discourse: The Olivet Discourse (24:1—25:46)
- 7. Conclusion Narratives (26:1—28:20)**
 - A. Anointing at Bethany (26:1-16)
 - B. The Last Supper (26:17-29)
 - C. Betrayal and Trials (26:30—27:26)
 - D. Crucifixion and Burial (27:27-66)
 - E. Resurrection (28:1-15)
 - F. The Great Commission (28:16-20)

Voices of the Saints

Since the Evangelists wrote what Christ stated and declared, it ought by no means be said that he wrote nothing himself, when in fact his members accomplished that which they had knowledge of by the statements of the head. For whatever he willed that we should read of his deeds and sayings, he commanded to be written by those Evangelists, as if they were his own hands.

—Saint Augustine, doctor of the Church

Catechism Connections

- To learn the three criteria the Church teaches for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Holy Spirit, see paragraphs 112-114 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*.
- For more information about how the Church was foreshadowed from the beginning of the world, see CCC 760.
- It was Jesus' task to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation in the fullness of time. To learn how the Church is the kingdom of heaven on earth, see CCC 763.

Rome to Home

Pope John Paul II called the Bible the “path to happiness” because through the words of Scripture God reveals fundamental morality.

In the Bible, God not only reveals himself but also the path to happiness. This is a theme that regards not only believers but, in a certain sense, every person of good will. Through the Bible, God speaks and reveals himself and indicates the solid basis and certain orientation for human behavior. The fundamental behaviors of biblical morality are: knowing God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ; recognizing his infinite goodness; knowing with a grateful and sincere soul that ‘all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights’; discovering in the gifts that God has given us the duties that he has entrusted to us; and acting in full awareness of our responsibilities in this regard. The Bible presents to us the inexhaustible riches of this Revelation of God and of his love for humanity.

—speaking to the 2004 assembly
of the Pontifical Biblical Commission

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Lesson 1

Gospel of Matthew



Jesus: Son of David, Son of Abraham

Early World	Patriarchs	Egypt & Exodus	Desert Wanderings	Conquest & Judges	Royal Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Messianic Fulfillment	The Church

Introduction

The word Gospel comes from a Greek word that means “good news.” By beginning his Gospel with the good news of Jesus’ genealogy, Matthew abbreviates salvation history and emphasizes continuity between the New Covenant of Jesus Christ and the previous covenants between God and his chosen people—the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel. This genealogical introduction to the Gospel of Matthew acts as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New and connects the great characters and events from the past with the ministry of Jesus. In the first chapter of the first Gospel, the Blessed Virgin Mary also is introduced. Pope Benedict XVI points out in his book, *Jesus, The Divine Teacher*, that Mary “binds together, in a living and indissoluble way, the old and the new people of God, Israel and Christianity, Synagogue and Church. She is, as it were, the connecting link without which the [Catholic] faith runs the risk of losing its balance by either forsaking the New Testament for the Old or dispensing with the Old.” Matthew’s Gospel focuses on the ways in which Jesus Christ fulfills the Old Covenant and establishes the New—and on the kingdom of heaven as the family of God. It should come as no surprise that Matthew begins telling the story of Jesus by introducing the Holy Family.

Matthew 1:1-25

1 ¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, ⁸and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and

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Joram the father of Uzziah,⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah,¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit;¹⁹ and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.²⁰ **But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; ²¹she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel”

(which means, God with us).²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife,²⁵ but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

[Please Note: One of the best ways to meditate on God’s Word is through memorization. A suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the Scripture text, or you may choose a verse of your own.]

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Study Questions

It's best to read all of Matthew 1:1-25 and *Points to Ponder* before responding to the study questions. To aid in discussion, please note Scripture verses where you find your responses.

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:1-17

1. There are only a few references to Matthew in the New Testament. What information do the following Scripture passages disclose about him (see *Mt* 9:9, *Mt* 9:10-12, *Mt* 10:3, *Lk* 5:27-32, and *Acts* 1:13-14)?
2. In Matthew 1:1, Jesus is described as “the son of David, the son of Abraham.” What promises did God make to Abraham and to David (see *Gen* 12:2-3 and *2 Sam* 7:12-13)? What do the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah foretell about the future “son of David” (see *Isa* 9:6-7 and *Jer* 23:5-6a)?
3. Compare the genealogy that introduces the Gospel of Matthew and the only other genealogy of Jesus Christ found in Scripture (see *Lk* 3:23-38). What do the different names found in these two genealogies indicate?
4. Matthew 1:3-6 very pointedly identifies four different women as ancestors of Jesus Christ—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “the wife of Uriah” (Bathsheba). Who are these women, what do they have in common, and what purpose might Matthew have in bringing them to the attention of his 1st-century Jewish readers (see *Gen* 38:1-30; *Josh* 2:1-14 and *Josh* 6:22-25; *Ruth* 1:1—4:22; and *2 Sam* 11:1-27 and *2 Sam* 12:15b-24)?

Matthew Lesson 1 Study Questions

5. What is grace, and where does it come from (see *CCC* 1996)? How did the women highlighted in Matthew's genealogy receive God's grace? How do Scripture and the Church teach that Mary, the mother of Jesus, received grace (see *Prov* 3:34, *Lk* 1:28, *Lk* 1:30, *Lk* 1:46-55, and *CCC* 411)?

6. What insight into Tamar's actions is found in Genesis 38:14? What did Judah say about her in Genesis 38:26, and how is she remembered in Ruth 4:12? In your opinion, how did each of the women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy demonstrate courage—or perhaps fail to show courage?

Mary and Joseph Matthew 1:18-25

7. In Matthew 1:19, what does Joseph do when he learns that Mary, his betrothed, is “with child of the Holy Spirit”? What happens to Joseph that causes him to abandon his previous plans and to go ahead and become the husband of Mary and the earthly father of the child to be named Jesus? Compare Joseph's role in regard to the Church with his role in regard to Mary and Jesus (see the *Rome to Home* excerpt from Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Custos*).

8. Matthew's is the only Gospel to report that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in his dreams. Luke's Gospel records the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary. What details about the conception of Jesus are found in Luke 1:26-38?

9. **But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”** In Matthew 1:20-21 (our suggested memory verses), Joseph is instructed by the angel to name the son to be born “Jesus,” the

Greek name for Joshua, which means “God saves.” In Hebrew, his name was “Yeshua,” a common 1st-century name. How does Jesus’ name reflect his mission (see *Acts* 4:12 and *1 Tim* 1:15a)? What does the Church teach about the name of Jesus in regard to prayer (see CCC 2666)? How does invoking the name of Jesus enable modern-day Christians to continue his saving mission (see CCC 1507)?

10. Paragraph 510 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* records that St. Augustine taught that Mary “remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin.” Matthew 1:25 establishes that Joseph “knew her not until she had borne a son.” In Scripture, how is the word “until” (often translated “till”) used, and does it imply a change of condition? How does this influence understanding of Matthew 1:25? How is the word “until” or “till” used elsewhere in the New Testament (see *1 Cor* 15:25 and *1 Tim* 4:13)?

Voices of the Saints

It was not deceitfully that the angel said to Joseph, “Fear not to take Mary, your wife.” She is called a wife from the first plighting of their troth, although he neither had nor ever would have any carnal knowledge of her.

—**St. Augustine, doctor of the Church**

Questions for Reflection

The following questions are designed to help you reflect further about how ideas in Matthew 1:1-25 might apply to your own life:

1. In Matthew 1:23, the first of 47 references from the Old Testament, Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14 to show that Jesus’ being born to a virgin fulfills messianic prophecy: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel’ (which means, God with us).” Provide as many examples as you can that indicate ways in which God is “with us”? Which of these examples connects you to God most profoundly?

Matthew Lesson 1 Reflection Questions

2. The Blessed Virgin Mary and Joseph both responded to God in loving obedience. What does this disclose about the priorities in their lives? With which particular aspects of their trials and blessings do you most identify? What area of your life could benefit by their intercession? What intercessions do you believe they're making for the Church today?

Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder—*Matthew 1:1-25*

Why Does Matthew Begin with a Genealogy?

It often strikes modern readers as peculiar that the first book of the New Testament begins with a genealogy. Both Matthew and Luke include genealogies in their Gospels, with a few slight differences. Matthew traces Jesus Christ's ancestors back to Abraham, while Luke traces the ancestral line all the way back to Adam. This reflects their different audiences. Matthew was a Jew writing for Jewish Christians, while Luke was a Gentile writing to a Gentile audience. Jewish Christians would have been very interested in the Messiah's connection to Abraham and David, while Gentiles would have been more interested in the Messiah's connection to Adam, from whom all men and women descended. The different names found in the two genealogies also appear to indicate that Matthew is tracing the "legal" line of Jesus through Joseph, while Luke may have been tracing the line through the Blessed Virgin Mary. Both Joseph and Mary were members of the tribe of Judah, and at the time of Jesus' birth it was common practice for people to marry within the same tribe.

Many contemporary readers tend to skip over genealogies, which they find boring. In the minds of the 1st-century Palestinian Jewish readers who made up Matthew's original target audience, a genealogy would have been vitally important, however. The clue as to why this is can be found in the first verse, which describes Matthew's Gospel as the "book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." By identifying Jesus with the two most important theological figures in Israel's past, Matthew aims to show that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Abraham and to David.

All of God's covenant oaths in the Old Testament represent "insurance policies" for the people of Israel. The three-fold covenant God enters into with Abraham ensures the survival of Abraham's seed, promises a land where Abraham and his family can dwell, and also guarantees that Abraham's descendants will be a channel of blessing to the whole world (*Gen 22:17-18*). By referring to Jesus Christ as the son of Abraham, Matthew is emphasizing Jesus' covenantal role in bringing blessing to the world.

In his covenant with David, God promised to build David a "house"—that is, a dynasty—and also promised David a dynastic heir. Through the prophet Nathan, God announces the special

relationship that will exist between God and David's heir: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam 7:14). It's this son of David who will build the Temple, or "house" that David himself wished to build for God. In addition, God promises that David's dynasty will be eternal: "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam 7:16).

It's fascinating to realize that David himself understands God is promising more than a political realm—he's promising that the son of David will rule over a priestly kingdom as well. In response to this great blessing from God, David composes Psalm 110, declaring: "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'" (Ps 110:4). Melchizedek was the priest-king of Salem (the ancient site on which the city of Jerusalem later was built) who, as a "priest of God Most High," blessed Abraham and offered bread and wine in an act that prefigures the sacrament of the Eucharist (Gen 14:18-20). David understands the priesthood of Melchizedek to be an older and more profound priesthood than the Levitical priesthood established shortly after the Exodus, and he knows from the prophet Nathan's promise that God means to make his heir a participant in that royal priesthood. As the ultimate recipient of God's covenant promise, Jesus Christ is the "son of David"—the Messiah—that the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel have been awaiting.

Women in the Genealogy

Lest his Jewish readers find this simply too incredible a claim to make regarding a peasant carpenter from such a backwater town as Nazareth, Matthew points out that the acknowledged heroes of Israel's history also arise from humble beginnings. His genealogy, which primarily is a list of Jesus' forefathers, identifies four women ancestors of Jesus who weren't born into the 12 tribes of Israel. Tamar, a Gentile, tricked her father-in-law, Judah, into having sexual relations with her in order to force him to honor his obligation to care for her in her widowhood (Gen 38:1-30). Rahab, a harlot living in Jericho, aided two Israelite spies and was spared when the city later was destroyed by Joshua and his forces (Josh 2:1-14 and Josh 6:22-25). Ruth, a Moabite woman, exemplified family loyalty after the death of her first husband when she chose to remain with her Israelite mother-in-law. Ruth becomes the wife of Boaz and the great-grandmother of David (Ruth 1:1—4:22). "The wife of Uriah" is Bathsheba, with whom David committed adultery. After David's murder of Uriah, Bathsheba married David and became the mother of King Solomon (2 Sam 11:1—12:25). Although all four of these women were foreigners and outcasts of society, they became part of the royal lineage of the descendants of King David.

By listing these four women, Matthew is reminding his 1st-century Jewish readers that they should be open to accepting the Blessed Virgin Mary as the mother of the Messiah, even though she also was an outcast due to the unique circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. The four women listed in Matthew's genealogy point toward the fifth woman in the ancestral line of the Messiah—Jesus' mother. Matthew anticipates one of his audience's main arguments against Jesus' messianic credentials—that Jesus' birth came about as the result of his mother being pregnant outside wedlock.

For practicing Jews, such information is insufficient to refute the claim that Jesus Christ is the long-awaited Messiah. Matthew actually uses it to advance his case when he refers to an Isaian prophecy: "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name

Matthew Lesson 1 Points to Ponder

Immanuel” (*Isa 7:14*). In Matthew 1:23, the emphasis is on the fact that the son will be born of a virgin, another meaning of the word that’s sometimes translated as “young woman” in the passage from the Old Testament. The virgin birth and the perpetual virginity of Mary are important dogmatic teachings of the Church regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Joseph the Righteous Man

In Matthew 1:19, readers learn that Joseph was a “just” or “righteous” man. The righteousness of Joseph is significant because it explains his behavior when he learns that the Blessed Virgin Mary is pregnant—Joseph “resolved to send her away quietly.” A common modern view of Joseph’s motivation may be called the “suspicion theory,” which holds that Joseph suspected Mary of adultery, and this explains his intention to divorce her quietly. The difficulty with this theory is that the righteousness of Joseph’s character is difficult to reconcile with his willingness to simply ignore part of the Deuteronomic code. Deuteronomy 22:23-24 required stoning a betrothed virgin found guilty of adultery—along with her male partner. Deuteronomy 24:1, however, allowed divorce in cases where a husband found “some indecency” in his wife. Selective obedience to the law of God is hard to reconcile with righteousness.

Another theory concerning Joseph’s motivation may be called the “reverence theory,” and it’s the belief held by St. Jerome, the premier Scripture scholar of antiquity. Those who endorse this point of view take the position that Joseph believed Mary when she told him that she was “with child of the Holy Spirit.” It’s precisely because of Joseph’s righteousness that he’s able to recognize his own unworthiness to become the husband of the woman chosen by God as mother of the Messiah. Viewed in this way, Joseph’s resolve to be secretive is seen as a reverent and discrete attempt to keep private what God himself has chosen to do in secret. The angel’s encouragement that Joseph need not fear to take Mary as his wife makes more sense if it’s assumed that Joseph understands the immense religious significance of the child about to be born. By addressing Joseph himself as a “son of David,” the angel is reminding Joseph that the Messiah is to be born of the family of David, and that, despite Joseph’s feelings of unworthiness, Joseph nevertheless is the man who’s been chosen by God to fulfill the role of protector of the infant Messiah and his mother.

Catechism Connections

- The name given the Messiah by the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation expresses Jesus’ identity and his mission. For more information, see *CCC* 430.
- *CCC* 497 explains how the Church views the virginal conception of Jesus as the fulfillment of divine prophecy.
- The Blessed Virgin Mary’s perpetual virginity is addressed in *CCC* 499.
- For more information about how Jesus’ name is connected with the sacrament of the Eucharist, see *CCC* 1846.

Rome to Home

Pope John Paul II wrote about the special role St. Joseph played in God’s plan for salvation.

“Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife” (*Mt* 1:24). Inspired by the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church from the earliest centuries stressed that just as St. Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ’s upbringing, he likewise watches over and protects Christ’s Mystical Body, that is, the Church, of which the Virgin Mary is the exemplar and model. . . . Christian people not only will turn to St. Joseph with greater fervor and invoke his patronage with trust, but also will always keep before their eyes his humble, mature way of serving and of “taking part” in the plan of salvation.

—*Redemptoris Custos*

Summary

In Matthew 1:1-25, we observed that:

1. Matthew begins his Gospel by identifying Jesus Christ as the son of David and the son of Abraham in order to call attention to Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises to Abraham and David.
2. In Matthew’s genealogy, four women are identified in the ancestral line of Jesus Christ, pointing to a fifth woman—the mother of the Messiah—who also was an outcast due to the unique circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus.
3. When Joseph, a “just” man, learns that the woman to whom he’s betrothed is “with child of the Holy Spirit,” he resolves to send Mary away quietly.
4. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, and Joseph takes Mary as his wife.
5. Matthew connects Jesus’ birth with an Isaian prophecy that a young woman will bear a son who will be called Emmanuel, which means, “God with us.”

Gospel of Matthew



Suggested responses to questions about Matthew 1:1-25

Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. Matthew 9:9 recounts Jesus' call to Matthew: "[Jesus] saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, 'Follow me,'" and Matthew's unquestioning response: "And he rose and followed him." Matthew 9:10-12 describes how immediately after that "many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples," prompting the Pharisees to criticize the company Jesus was keeping. Matthew 10:3 lists "Matthew the tax collector" as one of Jesus' 12 disciples. Luke 5:27-32 is parallel to Matthew 9:9-12, the calling and response of Matthew, but Luke points out that Matthew previously was known as "Levi." Acts 1:13-14 indicates that prior to Pentecost Matthew was present along with the other 10 disciples at prayer in the upper room with Mary, Jesus' cousins, and the other women who followed Jesus.
2. In Genesis 12:2-3, God promises Abraham: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves." In 2 Samuel 7:12-13, God promises David: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your son after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." Regarding the future "son of David," Isaiah 9:6-7 includes the prophecy: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore." Jeremiah 23:5-6a records another Old Testament prophecy concerning the "son of David": "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely."
3. Both Matthew and Luke include genealogies in their Gospels, with a few slight differences. Matthew traces Jesus Christ's ancestors back to Abraham, while Luke 3:23-38 traces the ancestral line all the way back to Adam. This reflects their different audiences. Matthew was a Jew writing for Jewish Christians, while Luke was a Gentile writing to a Gentile audience. Jewish Christians would have been very interested in the Messiah's connection to Abraham and David, while Gentiles would have been more interested in the Messiah's connection to Adam, from whom all men and women descended. The different names found in the two genealogies also appear to indicate that Matthew is tracing the "legal" ancestral line of Jesus through Joseph, while Luke may have been tracing the line through the Blessed Virgin

Matthew Lesson 1 Suggested Responses

Mary. Both Joseph and Mary were members of the tribe of Judah, and at the time of Jesus' birth it was common practice for people to marry within the same tribe.

4. Genesis 38:1-30 tells the story of how Tamar was married to one of Judah's sons, widowed, then married to a second of his sons and widowed yet again. After being denied marriage to the third son, Tamar tricks Judah, her father-in-law, into having sexual relations with her. She gives birth to twins, one of whom (Perez) becomes an ancestor of Jesus. Joshua 2:1-14 and Joshua 6:22-25 recount how Rahab, a harlot living in Jericho, saved two Israelite spies and so was spared when Joshua later destroyed the city. The book of Ruth records the story of a Moabite woman, Ruth, who exemplified family loyalty after the death of her first husband when she chose to remain with her Israelite mother-in-law. Ruth becomes the wife of Boaz and the great grandmother of David. In 2 Samuel 11:1-27, the affair between King David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, is recorded. 2 Samuel 12:15b-24 recounts the death of the baby conceived in adultery and the birth of David and Bathsheba's second son, Solomon. Although all four of these women were foreigners and outcasts of society, they became part of the royal lineage of the descendants of King David. Matthew is reminding his 1st-century Jewish readers that they should be open to accepting the Blessed Virgin Mary as the mother of the Messiah, even though she also was an outcast due to the unique circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. That these four women were all foreigners emphasizes that Jesus the Messiah fulfills the promise God made to Abraham to bless all nations through him, and that Jesus came to save all people. The four women listed in Matthew's genealogy point toward the fifth woman in the ancestral line of the Messiah—Jesus' mother. Matthew anticipates one of his audience's main arguments against Jesus' messianic credentials—that Jesus' birth came about as the result of his mother being pregnant outside of wedlock.
5. Paragraph 1996 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that grace is “*favor, the free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.” The women Matthew highlights in his genealogy receive God's grace to become part of the ancestral line of the Messiah—Tamar receives the grace to bear a child of the same bloodline as her previous late husbands; Rahab receives the grace of being spared, along with her family, from death when the Israelites destroyed Jericho; Bathsheba receives the grace to bear Solomon after the death of her first son; Ruth receives the grace to marry Boaz after the death of her husband and to become the mother of Obed. Proverbs 3:34 anticipates Mary's humility when it teaches: “Toward the scornful he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favor.” In Luke 1:28, the angel Gabriel calls Mary “full of grace.” In Luke 1:30, he repeats that Mary has “found favor with God.” In Luke 1:46-55, Mary praises God for the blessings he has bestowed on her and on the people of Israel, and in Luke 1:49, she specifically says that God “has done great things” for her. Paragraph 411 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception by teaching that the Blessed Virgin Mary “benefited first of all and uniquely from Christ's victory over sin: she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life.”
6. Genesis 38:14 records that Tamar “put off her widow's garments, and put on a veil, wrapping herself up” to present herself to Judah, because “she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she

had not been given to him in marriage.” She was determined to bear a child of the family of Judah, and she saw that Judah hadn’t kept his promise. In Genesis 38:26, Judah says about Tamar: “She is more righteous than I.” In Ruth 4:12, the elders commend Tamar who bore Perez to Judah. *Responses will vary to the question regarding how the women in Matthew’s genealogy demonstrated or failed to show courage.* Possible responses include that Tamar demonstrated courage by defending her rights. Even though she used means that wouldn’t be considered praiseworthy, her intentions were noble, and God rewarded her boldness. Rahab risked her life for the Israelite spies and boldly asked that her own life and the lives of her family be spared. God blessed her for her generosity and courage. Ruth courageously left her homeland and loyally followed her mother-in-law to Bethlehem. Ruth worked hard to provide for her mother-in-law, and she was rewarded for her loyalty, hard work, and courage. Bathsheba may be difficult to describe as courageous, but she suffered the loss of her husband, Uriah, and her first son before becoming the mother of Solomon and the queen mother, as described in 1 Kings 2:19. Mary showed courage by accepting and obeying the word of God brought to her by the angel Gabriel, and she became the mother of the Messiah.

7. Matthew 1:19 explains that when Joseph learns that Mary, his betrothed, is with child of the Holy Spirit he “resolved to divorce her quietly” because he was “a just man and unwilling to put her to shame.” In Matthew 1:20-21, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream saying: “[D]o not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” This enables Joseph to abandon his previous plans and to go ahead and become the husband of Mary and the earthly father of the child to be named Jesus. In *Redemptoris Custos*, Pope John Paul II wrote that “just as St. Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ’s upbringing, he likewise watches over and protects Christ’s Mystical Body, that is, the Church, of which the Virgin Mary is the exemplar and model.”
8. Luke 1:26-38 describes Mary’s reaction to the news from the angel Gabriel that she had found favor with God and would conceive and bear a son and call his name Jesus. In Luke 1:34, Mary asks the angel: “How can this be, since I have no husband?” and the angel explains to Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.” In Luke 1:38, Mary’s reaction to the angel is humble obedience: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”
9. Jesus’ name means “God saves,” which reflects his mission to save people from their sins. Acts 4:12 teaches: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” In 1 Timothy 1:15a, St. Paul writes: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Paragraph 2666 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches in regard to praying to Jesus: “But the one name that contains everything is the one that the Son of God received in his incarnation: JESUS. . . . To pray ‘Jesus’ is to invoke him and to call him within us.” Paragraph 1507 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that invoking the name of Jesus enables modern-day Christians to continue his saving mission, which is

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confirmed “through the signs that the Church performs by invoking his name. These signs demonstrate in a special way that Jesus is truly ‘God who saves.’”

10. In Scripture, the word “until” (sometimes translated as “till”) can be used to highlight a time frame without indicating any change at the conclusion of the time period. Matthew 1:25 establishes that Joseph didn’t have relations with Mary before the birth of Jesus—it doesn’t imply that he did so after. In 1 Corinthians 15:25, St. Paul writes: “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” Use of the word “until” in this passage doesn’t imply that Jesus Christ will cease to reign after he has conquered his enemies. In 1 Timothy 4:13, St. Paul writes: “Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching.” Use of the word “till” in this passage doesn’t imply that Timothy no longer will need to attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, or to teaching after St. Paul arrives.

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.