



**MATTHEW**

.....  
**MICHAEL KASTING**

**LIVING WAY**  
BIBLE STUDY

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# WELCOME TO LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY (LWBS)

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LWBS is a practical course of study with a special emphasis on the application of God's Word to the life of the individual. While emphasizing practical application, LWBS presents each book of the Bible as the holy, inspired Word of God, the confessional position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

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It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18).

## STUDY STRUCTURE

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### LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTS THIS FOUR-STEP METHOD

- 1. PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
- 2. SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- 3. THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- 4. THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

*Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page.* The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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# MATTHEW

MICHAEL KASTING

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*Blood and Life – Sermons on the Old Testament*

*Through the Needle's Eye: Sermons on the Gospels*

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*Matthew’s Gospel has often been identified as a “teaching Gospel” more than the others.*



What’s the most important book you’ve ever read? That was the question put to the public ahead of Academic Book Week in 2017. A panel of booksellers, librarians and publishers nominated 200 titles, and members of the public were asked to vote online for their top 20. The final list included works by Darwin, Shakespeare, Plato, and Karl Marx, but made no mention of the first book ever printed, the world’s annual best seller, the book with portions translated into 3,000 of the 7,000 known human languages!

That book is the Bible. Many people commit large portions to memory. Many countries ban it, but smugglers willingly risk their lives to bring copies in. Why? Because it is the original and most powerful witness to the life of Jesus Christ, undeniably the most important person who ever lived, confessed as Savior and Lord by almost two billion people today. It’s the reason you and I are taking up this study together. For us there is no doubt about this book’s influence and importance!

The Bible, of course, is actually a library. The word “Bible” means “books” (plural).

Among those “books” of the Bible, we don’t really need to decide which is most important. We can enjoy them all for various reasons. But one man who cast a vote long ago was French scholar Ernest Renan. He called the Gospel of Matthew “the most important book ever written.” He may have been right.

## THE FIRST AMONG FOUR

Matthew is the first book in the New Testament, the first in a sequence of four Gospels that bear witness to Jesus. The Evangelists, writes Paul Maier, “were the four most successful authors in history. But they never saw a word of theirs in print, nor did they collect a penny in royalties.”

Matthew has been listed in the first position ever since the Muratorian Canon (second century AD) established its priority. The canonical order was repeated through the centuries, sometimes in poetry, more often in art. The “Black Paternoster,” an ancient prayer and nursery rhyme dating from the sixteenth century, addressed the four Evangelists as if they were guardian angels:

*Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,  
Bless the bed that I lie on.  
Four corners to my bed,  
Four angels round my head;  
One to watch and one to pray  
And two to bear my soul away.*

In churchly art, the four Evangelists have often been represented by the four “living creatures” (lion, ox, eagle, and man) mentioned in Rev. 4:6–9, which in turn seem to be based on Ezek. 1:10. These have been variously explained. The explanation given to this writer during his school days was as follows:

*Mark is symbolized by the LION because his Gospel begins with John the Baptist in the wilderness, roaring like a lion.*

*Luke is represented by the OX, because the ox is an animal used in sacrifice, and Luke’s Gospel begins and ends in the Temple in Jerusalem.*

*John’s symbol is the EAGLE, a creature once believed to be able to look straight into the sun. John, the “beloved disciple,” by virtue of his closeness to the Lord, was able more than the others to look straight into Jesus’ face.*

*Matthew is symbolized by a winged MAN. His Gospel begins with Jesus’ family tree, witnessing His human connections and His incarnation.*

## WHO, WHEN, AND TO WHOM?

Who was the author? That’s not a frivolous question, for none of the Gospels name their authors. The first known attribution of this first Gospel as “according to Matthew” (Greek *Kata Matthaion*) was by a bishop named Papias early in the second century. His source of information was probably strong, for early church fathers unanimously agreed that “Matthew,” the tax collector for Herod Antipas whose call is narrated in Matt. 9:9–13, authored this Gospel. No strong case can be made against it even today.

When did he write? That’s hard to answer with any certainty since there is little inside the book to pin down a date and no help from outside sources either. It is clear that the good news of Jesus circulated orally for at least twenty years after His ascension. But when the eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus began to die, there arose a need for a written record of “the things that have been accomplished among us” (Luke 1:1). The earliest guess by scholars is in the mid to late ‘50s AD. Depending on Matthew’s relationship to Mark and the date of Mark’s writing, the date could be still later. The latest date identified by scholars is the decade of the ‘80s.

Early church tradition claimed that Matthew evangelized first among the Jews in Palestine and later among Gentiles in foreign lands. It appears that Matthew had a distinctly Jewish-Christian audience in mind as he wrote. Two possible destinations for the Gospel are Palestine or Antioch in Syria.

## THE “SYNOPTIC PROBLEM”

So how are the Four Gospels related to each other? Did any of the Evangelists use each other as sources, as Luke admits to doing (Luke 1:1–3 — “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also . . . to write an orderly account for you”)? Did they utilize some outside compilation of sayings or stories?

Even without special training, most readers of the

Gospels will see that Matthew, Mark, and Luke employ similar outlines and, in many places, exhibit word-for-word correspondence, while John's account varies widely from the other three. The first three Gospels, accordingly, have been called the "Synoptics" (the Greek word means "seeing together"). The puzzle of ascertaining their interrelationship is known as "the Synoptic Problem." One can, of course, understand their message without solving that puzzle! But making the comparisons can help highlight the unique contributions each Evangelist makes in the same way that jurors listen carefully to the unique perspective of each witness to come before them.

For a long time, scholars were convinced that Matthew was not only listed first, but written first. His substantial agreements with Mark revealed an interrelationship that implied Mark's dependence on Matthew as a source. But in the nineteenth century, opinion began to swing toward Markan priority, especially because, in their shared narratives, Mark was more detailed. Matthean abbreviation seemed more likely than Markan expansion, especially since Matthew was an eyewitness, while Mark was not. Opinion about which was written first is still divided.

Meanwhile, others noticed that Matthew and Luke shared material in common that did not appear at all in Mark. Some scholars proposed that, because of the closeness of the verbal parallels, Matthew and Luke relied upon a common outside source, later identified with the letter "Q" (for the German word *Quelle*, meaning "source"). The existence of such a document, of course, is just an educated guess.

Most commentaries go into this matter at great length, in far more detail than we need for our purposes. It will be sufficient for us to stop now and then to note similarities and differences between Matthew and the other three Evangelists so that we hear his message clearly. Always it will be our task to let Matthew bear his unique witness to us of Jesus Christ and the life He brings!

### PREVIEWING MATTHEW

Before taking a trip, it's useful (and fun!) to check out one's itinerary. That way the family won't miss the attractions along the way. Let's have a brief preview of Matthew's Gospel to whet our appetites for the journey we're about to make. What are some of the things we don't want to miss?

Matthew's Gospel has often been identified as a "teaching Gospel" more than the others (Floyd Filson uses this description). Some even suggest it is a summary of the early church's catechesis. The teaching features some of Jesus' longer discourses. This writer still remembers seminary professor Edgar Krentz pointing out five great speeches in the narrative. These are:

- The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5–7
- The Missionary Discourse – Matthew 10
- Parables of the Kingdom – Matthew 13
- Discourse on True Greatness – Matthew 18
- The Great Eschatological (End Times) Discourse – Matthew 24–25

While these speeches are certainly high points, they do not of themselves constitute an outline of the book. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, whose

commentary on Matthew is the primary resource for this study, offers a three-part outline promoted originally by Dr. Jack Dean Kingsbury, as follows:

Part One – Jesus Presented – Matthew 1:1–4:16

This part summarizes the person and significance of Jesus.

Part Two – Ministry and Opposition in Israel – Matthew 4:17–16:20

This part details the words and deeds of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, along with the rising tide of questions, conflict, and opposition to Him.

Part Three – The Road to the Cross, Resurrection, and Commission – Matthew 16:21–28:20

This part brings us to the cross and the empty tomb at the heart of Jesus’ mission to “save his people from their sins.”

Along the way we will see other notably Matthean emphases. One of his primary themes is the “kingship” (reign) of God, spelled out with the recurring phrase, “the kingdom of heaven is like” Another strong component of this Gospel is the persistent pattern of prophecy and fulfillment, not only in the citation of some 40 passages from the Old Testament but in the description of Jesus’ life, which recapitulated, in some ways, the experiences of the nation of Israel and so “fulfilled” the destiny of the nation. For that reason, Matthew is the perfect bridge from the Old Testament to the New. The recurring mentions of “fulfillment” of prophecy is one of many reasons scholars believe Matthew’s audience was primarily a Jewish one. No other New Testament author has so many Old Testament quotes and allusions as does Matthew. Along the way we will pay close attention to the titles Matthew uses to communicate the person and work of Jesus.

Now and then we will stop to appreciate features of the story of Jesus that are told by Matthew alone, such as the coming of the Wise Men, the story of the temple tax in the fish’s mouth (wouldn’t you expect that from Matthew the tax collector?), ten parables found only in this Gospel, the death of Judas, the earthquake after the crucifixion, the posting of the guard at the tomb, and the only two uses of the word “church” in the Gospels.

Because this writer is convinced that memorization of portions of the Bible is still a useful and edifying practice, we will recommend verses to memorize. An investment of time in doing this will, we are confident, yield rich dividends to those who make that commitment. And why not, since Matthew is a prime candidate for “the most important book ever written”!

Are you ready for some study?



## PERSONAL APPLICATION

*Prayer as we prepare: Lord God, guide me in this study of Matthew's Gospel. Teach me to know who Jesus is, and who I am because of Him! In His name I pray. Amen.*

1. Before taking this course, how much did you know about Matthew's Gospel? What new things did you learn about it this week?

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2. What do you think is the value of having four Gospels instead of just one? Is there any downside to having four different views?

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Matthew 1:1–17

3. Have you (or has someone in your extended family) explored your own family tree? What can you learn about your ancestors (and yourself!) from getting your DNA tested?

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4. List the titles Matthew uses to describe Jesus in vv. 1 and 16. What's important about them? (compare Gen. 12:1–3 and 17:6–8; 2 Sam. 7:12–16)

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5. Read attentively through the genealogy of Jesus. How many of these names are familiar? What symmetry does Matthew highlight in v. 17? What event climaxes each section?

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6. In v. 8 Matthew lists Joram (or Jehoram NIV) as the father of Uzziah (also known as Azariah). Compare this verse with 1 Chron. 3:11–12. What difference do you see? What might this indicate about Matthew's genealogy?

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7. Jewish genealogies did not normally include women. How many women are included in this one? As time allows, look up the names in a concordance. What discoveries do you make?

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8. Compare Matthew's genealogy with the genealogy in Luke 3:23–38. How far back into history does each one go? According to Luke's version, whose son is Jesus? (compare vv. 23 and 38)

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9. What, if anything, has been passed on to you spiritually from your ancestors? Did they influence your faith, values, or connection with a church? Or did you make such choices on your own?

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Matthew 1:18-25

10. Understanding Joseph's decision requires understanding Jewish marriage practice. Using the clues in vv. 18-19 ("betrothed," "came together," "her husband," and "divorce"), what do you learn about the marriage customs of the Jews?

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11. If you had been in Joseph's place, how would you have felt? What would have been the most difficult aspect of his situation: a) Believing no other man was involved? b) Explaining this to the relatives? c) Facing the gossip of neighbors?

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12. What does the angel's message reveal about the child to be born? How does it change Joseph's understanding? His decision?

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13. What name is to be given the child? What does the name tell you about why He was born?

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14. Matthew says (vv. 22-23) all this will fulfill a prophecy. What prophecy does he quote? What does the prophecy say about the mother? The son?

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15. Can you say with conviction that "God is with me"? If so, what makes you certain of it?

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### MEMORY VERSE

Matthew 1:21 "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

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*The Gospel of Matthew opens with a genealogy which aims to answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” Wonderful discoveries await those who examine it!*

### ROOTS

Who am I? Author Alex Haley conducted a twelve-year search of census lists, ships' records, and other historical documents to find an answer to that question. Eventually he made a trip to Gambia to learn more about his ancestors' journey from Africa to America on a slave ship. His book *Roots*, the family story that unfolded through seven generations from 1767 into the twentieth century, was made into a popular TV mini-series and captured the imagination of millions of people. In the process Haley said he discovered much about who he was.

Who am I? Many people today try to answer that question by building a family tree through Ancestry.com or having their DNA tested to see if they are French or Native American or Scotch-Irish. Along the way some learn they have “royal blood.” Others discover they have a genetic susceptibility to certain diseases.

The Gospel of Matthew opens with a genealogy which aims to answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” Wonderful discoveries await those who examine it! A close look reveals that there were some Gentile branches in His Jewish family tree. We also learn that He had “royal blood.” He was a King descended from a line of kings, a man to whom ancient promises from God were attached.

That family tree is worth a long look, because when we learn who Jesus is, we also learn who we are.

## A KING'S GENEALOGY

### MATTHEW 1:1

The Old Testament begins with the Book of Genesis. The very first words of Matthew are, literally, “the book of the genesis” (*biblos geneseos*)! The ESV translates it “The book of the genealogy” of Jesus Christ. Jeff Gibbs renders it “The book of the origin.” Later in v. 18 the same word is translated “birth.”

But this is not a straightforward “birth narrative.” Matthew spends very little time detailing the story of Jesus’ birth, as Luke does. Instead he is at pains to explore the genealogical connections of this man, especially His “royal roots.” He makes clear at the outset that this is a king’s family tree with a string of three titles: “Christ,” “son of David,” and “son of Abraham.” In so doing, he bridges the two testaments. The titles in the Old Testament are now applied to Jesus. It is all one story.

Verse 17 reminds us that “Christ” is not a last name, but a title (“*the* Christ”). It’s the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew title Messiah, the “anointed one” the Jews had long been awaiting (cf. Ps. 2:2 and 89:20). The very next title, “son of David,” recalls God’s promise of a king from David’s line whose kingdom would be established “forever” (2 Sam. 7:2–16, especially v. 13).

“Could Jesus be the Messiah?” Matthew’s Jewish readers wanted to know. When Jesus stood on trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest put the fateful question to Him directly: “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ” (Matt. 26:63). Matthew leaves no doubt. This man Jesus IS the one! The new age of God’s reign has begun in Him.

That third title, “son of Abraham,” is a title used nowhere else in the New Testament. It too testifies to the kingly roots of Jesus (“kings shall come from you” — Gen. 17:6).

Interestingly, it points to Jesus as Savior also for Gentiles, since it is to Abraham that God makes the promise, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Matthew’s Gospel ends with Jesus’ command to missionize “all nations.” Everyone, both Jew and Gentile, has a stake in the news Matthew brings in this book!

## FASCINATING BRANCHES IN THE FAMILY TREE

### MATTHEW 1:2–16

We jokingly refer to biblical genealogies as “a list of ‘begats’.” Matthew’s genealogy uses the Greek word *egeneesen* (“begat” or “was the father of”) 39 times. Four times it appears in conjunction with “from” or “by” to denote the mother from whom the child was begotten. The only exception is Jesus. Joseph is not “the father of” Jesus, but “the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born” (v. 16).

Many of the names we read here are familiar. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob head the list in the first part of the genealogy. There are famous kings in the section that follows: David, Solomon, and Hezekiah are probably the best known of these. There’s royalty in these branches! Except for Zerubbabel, the names in the third section are less well known. That section ends with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus — the Holy Family.

Some especially notable branches in the tree are the five women Matthew includes — Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the “wife of Uriah,” and Mary. Their appearance is noteworthy since women were normally not included in Jewish genealogies. Many writers assert that these women are to be considered Gentiles or sinners or both, demonstrating God’s desire to “use even the humble and despised to accomplish his purpose” (Marshall Johnson). So is that the point of their inclusion?

Two of these women, Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite, are undeniably Gentiles, an early hint at the inclusion of Gentiles in God's design. The Bible does not expressly say that Tamar (Gen. 38:6–30) or Uriah's wife (Bathsheba — see 2 Sam. 11:2–12:25) were Gentiles, though Bathsheba was married to a Hittite. All were sinners (as are we all!), but were they especially notorious sinners? Though Tamar posed as a prostitute and had a child by her father-in-law, Judah, he declared that "she is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26). Bathsheba's adulterous affair with David produced Solomon, but curiously, Bathsheba's name is not used here. Is that to stress that the greater guilt in their liaison was David's? Though Rahab (Josh. 2:1–21) was a prostitute, she was kind to the Israelite spies, an act which lands her in the "faith chapter" of Hebrews (Heb. 11:31). Ruth, the Moabite, is exemplary for her loyalty to Naomi and her adoption of the faith of Israel.

What all of these women DO show is that God is in control, often in spite of humans' intentions. All four of these woman became part of the family tree in unusual fashion. They show us that God accomplishes His purpose in surprising ways, most of all in Mary, as we will see.

### NUMBERS SYMMETRICAL AND PERPLEXING

#### *MATTHEW 1:17*

Matthew is at pains to demonstrate a symmetry in the list. "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" (v. 17). One cannot ignore such a striking pattern. It begs to be explored.

That numbering is perplexing to moderns who desire completeness and precision in a genealogy. Is this really "all the generations"? Matthew has certainly compacted what must have been many more generations. For example, in the sequence of Hezron, Ram, and Amminidab (vv. 3–4), he is covering hundreds of years in just three generations. Hezron went down to Egypt in the time of Joseph (Gen. 46:12). Amminadab is mentioned in Num. 1:7 as the father of one living in the time of Moses, some four centuries later! In v. 8 Matthew omits three generations between Joram and Uzziah/Azariah (see 1 Chron. 3:11–12). "Modern precision," observes Gibbs, "is to be neither expected nor required of the evangelist."

One other curiosity is that Matthew's count seems off by one name. Three sections of fourteen names should yield 42 names, but a careful reading reveals only 41. David ends the first section and cannot be counted in the second. Jechoniah ends the second and cannot be counted again in the third. The result is that the third section has only thirteen names. Or does it? Donald Hagner suggests that the "Jechoniah" at v. 11 ("at the time of the deportation") may be referring to King Jehoiakim, the biological son of Josiah, and that the "Jechoniah" at v. 12 ("after the deportation") may be referring to King Jehoiachin, who was Jehoiakim's son (see 2 Kings 23:34–24:17). Got that?

Names aside, how do we make sense of the number pattern? It may well be that Matthew's structure of 3 x 14 generations has the purpose of communicating something more than arithmetic precision. The numbering is a device to communicate that history is moving toward a goal. An orderly God is guiding ("fourteen . . . fourteen . . . fourteen") and Jesus is the fulfillment of a deliberate process. Everything that came before Him culminates in Him!

Is there anything significant about "fourteen"? Some writers allege that the numerical value of the name "David" totals 14 (if a minimal and not a full spelling of "David" is used). But there could be another reason. Gibbs suggests that it is not the number fourteen itself, but its REPETITION that matters. 1 Chron. 1-2 lists 14 names from Abraham to David. Perhaps Matthew wants to show a symmetry and orderliness in God's dealing with Israel. The number three (a number that was "God's number" for Jews) would emphasize that God is at work here!

### LUKE'S GENEALOGY COMPARED

#### *LUKE 3:23-38*

Luke, a man with a penchant for historical detail, also includes a genealogy in his Gospel, and comparing the two is enlightening. In spite of similarities and some shared names, it is the differences that absorb us. The most obvious of these is that Matthew starts at the beginning and moves forward in time. Luke starts at the end and moves backward. The second is that Luke's list goes all the way back to Adam, while Matthew goes only to Abraham. Matthew's focus is on the history of Israel. Luke's is wider. Matthew stresses the Jewish titles applied to Jesus, especially "Christ." Luke makes no mention of Christ, but ends his genealogy with the words "the son of God" (Lk. 3:38), a title with wider meaning in the Gentile world.

In the historic period where they overlap, Matthew has 41 names, while Luke provides 57. The Abraham to David sections almost agree. In the David to Salathiel portion, there is NO agreement in names except David and Salathiel. Further, Matthew's names are king names and Luke's are not. Luke's names, in fact, have no known parallel in the Old Testament. Joseph's father is listed as Jacob in Matthew and as Heli in Luke. What are we to make of it?

Many suggestions have been made in how to reconcile these divergent family trees. The most compelling one is that Luke is giving us the "biological" ancestry of Jesus through Mary, while Matthew is tracing His "legal" ancestry through Joseph. This would be understandable in light of Mary's prominence in Luke's birth narrative, and if we further note that in Luke 3:23, Luke tells us that Jesus was the son "as was supposed" of Joseph. The coincidence of earlier names on the list may indicate that BOTH Mary and Joseph were descended from David's line (some read Luke 1:27 as saying this).

Having given us the genealogy, Matthew now tells us more about the identity of this wondrous child through the story of His birth in vv. 18-25.

### UNEXPECTED BIRTH

#### *MATTHEW 1:18-19*

Matthew's account is not a favored reading at Christmas services because it describes an awkward situation: Joseph and Mary are engaged and legally "married," but they have not yet consummated their union. Mary's pregnancy initially appears to Joseph to be illegitimate!

For the Jews, marriage was in two stages. Stage one, betrothal, might last as long as a year. It rendered the couple legally married and could be broken only by divorce or death. Stage two was the consummation, the sexual union.

Joseph and Mary were between the two stages. She was discovered to be pregnant, and Joseph assumed she had been unfaithful to him. He “resolved to divorce her quietly” (v. 19). It would be a private divorce, with only the priest and the husband as the two required witnesses (Num. 5:11–31), not a humiliating public divorce.

It was the wrong decision, though made for the right reason! Joseph is both “just” and compassionate toward her (according to Deut. 22:13–29, an adulterous woman should have been stoned!), but unaware of God’s working. Gibbs calls it his “well-meaning incomprehension.” Joseph did not expect what God was doing. Nor would we! God’s inscrutable ways are revealed to Joseph by an angel’s message in a dream and to us readers by the citation of Is. 7:14.

**REMARKABLE NAMES**

*MATTHEW 1:20-25*

One night Joseph had a vivid dream in which an angel of God appeared with an explanation and a command: “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (v. 20–21).

There had been wondrous births before (Isaac to Sarah a prime example), but never one “from the Holy Spirit.” The child’s singular origin in GOD signaled His singular mission. Others like Moses and the Judges had been dispatched by God to rescue Israel, but no one had yet been sent to “save from sins”!

This child’s very name would be His job description. “Jesus” is the Greek form of “Joshua,” which means “God saves.” For in this child (make no mistake, Joseph!), God Himself

would be at work saving! Matthew underlines it all for his readers by adding a second wondrous name supplied by the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)” (Matt. 1:23, citing Is. 7:14).

The infrequently-used Hebrew word *ha’almah* that Matthew renders as “virgin” can have more than one meaning. It may simply indicate a marriageable “maiden,” or it may more narrowly denote a “virgin.” The only birth of a child mentioned in the original context was Isaiah’s own son (Is. 8:1–4), but his mother was neither a maiden nor a virgin. Whatever the fulfillment of this word was in Ahaz’s day (read on through Isaiah 8 and 9), the king did not accept it, and the full import of Isaiah’s words awaited some more distant fulfillment. Matthew is saying, “That fulfillment has now come!” In the Apostles’ Creed we confess Jesus as the one “born of the Virgin Mary.” At Christmas we sing to our “Immanuel,” for in Him, God has come to be with us, finally and fully!

All this took place “to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet” (v. 22). This is the first of ten times that Matthew introduces an Old Testament quote with some variation of this distinctive formula — “what was spoken” was “fulfilled.” It was a message particularly for Jews who had so long lived in expectancy. Jesus’ entire life and ministry took place in fulfillment of the Old Testament. The hopes of the nation were not dashed by the Exile! The long night of waiting was over.

Unlike wicked Ahaz, faithful Joseph accepted the word from God and took Mary home as his wife. We who read this news, likewise, are invited to receive God’s Word and believe that in Jesus, we have a Savior from our sin and sorrow.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

*Lord Jesus Christ, You are not just “a king” but “my King”! Help me, as I study this lesson, to kneel before You in humble adoration. Then enable me to confess Your name so that others may know You too. Amen.*

## For Review

1. People sometimes complain that genealogies are dull. What did you discover about the genealogy of Jesus that makes it interesting?

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2. What’s the meaning of “Jesus”? Of “Immanuel”? Taken together, what do these names tell us about Him?

## Matthew 2:1–12

3. Read about “Herod the Great” on the internet or in a Bible dictionary. What do his “life dates” tell you about when Jesus was born? What kind of person was Herod?

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4. Use your Bible footnotes to find the source of the quote in v. 6. Read the quote in its original setting. Do the verses match? Besides the place of Jesus’ birth, what else does the Old Testament reference say about Him?

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5. What misconceptions about the “Wise Men” does a close reading of the text dispel?

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6. Since the Wise Men were probably pagan astrologers, why do you think they would they leave their countries to seek out Jesus?

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7. Have you had to leave anything behind to follow Jesus? What is the “gold, frankincense, and myrrh” in your life?

## Matthew 2:13–15

8. How does Matthew explain the destination God chooses for the Holy Family’s flight? How does this episode in Jesus’ life remind you of the history of the nation Israel?

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9. Once again, look up the source of the Old Testament citation in v. 15. Read the verse in its original setting. Who is “my son” there? Is the passage a prediction or something else?



Matthew 2:16–18

10. What connection, if any, do you see between Matt. 2:1–18 and Rev. 12:1–6? How can it be that the birth of Jesus is “bad news” that provokes a hostile response by some people?

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11. What does Herod’s order tell you about him? Of what age were the children of Bethlehem slain by his soldiers?

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12. Another prophecy! Once again, look up the Old Testament source of this quote in v. 18. Read also Gen. 35:19. Why is Rachel mentioned?

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13. Where in our world now do you see the rage of Herod against Jesus being replicated?

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Matthew 2:19–23

14. What’s Joseph’s reason for returning to Nazareth instead of Judea?

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15. How many times in the first two chapters of Matthew does God communicate with someone in a dream? Why does God choose this medium of communication? Do you think He still does that today?

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16. What can you learn from the internet or from a Bible dictionary about the city of Nazareth? Why do you suppose Nathanael disparaged the town in John 1:46?

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17. The chapter ends with still another prophetic fulfillment. Do you discover a source in your footnotes? What do you make of this?

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18. If God asked you to relocate, how long would it take you to say yes? What objections might you raise?

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19. How do you see this chapter reinforcing any of Matthew’s cherished themes?

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