

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

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

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

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

<sup>17</sup>So 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.

<sup>18</sup>Now 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;<sup>19</sup> and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to send her away quietly.<sup>20</sup> **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; <sup>21</sup>she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

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

(which means, God with us).<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife,<sup>25</sup> 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.
  
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.

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 descendants of the twelve tribes 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.

The four women listed in Matthew’s genealogy point toward the fifth woman in the ancestral line of the Messiah—the Blessed Virgin Mary, Jesus’ mother. Matthew anticipates one of his audience’s main arguments against Jesus’ messianic credentials—that Jesus’ humble beginnings negate the possibility that he could be the Savior and king whose birth is foretold in Old Testament prophecies.

For anyone familiar with these prophecies, such information is insufficient to refute the claim that Jesus Christ is the long-awaited Messiah. Matthew even uses the unusual circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth to a young woman who’s a virgin as an argument to advance his case. Very early in his Gospel, Matthew refers to an Isaian prophecy that would have been well-known to his readers: “Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name 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

## **Matthew Lesson 1 Points to Ponder**

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.

### **A Just and Obedient Man**

In Matthew 1:19, readers learn that Joseph was a “just” man. A common modern view of why Joseph resolved to send Mary away quietly after he learned that she was pregnant hinges on the interpretation of what constitutes “just” behavior. Proponents of this view hold that Joseph suspected Mary of infidelity, and Joseph’s intention to send her away demonstrates his deep regard for moral propriety as well as a concern for Mary’s reputation. This theory fails to address the fact that such mistrust of Mary’s character by Joseph is impossible to reconcile with what’s known about his own character—that he’s a man who is so just that he’s been specially chosen by God to be the protector of both the child Jesus and his mother. Common sense rules out serious consideration of this “suspicion theory” to explain Joseph’s intention to send Mary away.

Although Scripture fails to explain everything that was going on in Joseph’s mind, scholars continue to speculate about his motivation for wanting to send Mary away. Some endorse the “reverence theory,” taking the position that Joseph understands that the Blessed Virgin Mary is “with child of the Holy Spirit.” People who hold this view believe that Joseph is reluctant to become the husband of the woman chosen by God as mother of the Messiah because he recognizes his unworthiness to assume this role.

This sense of unworthiness arising from being in the presence of Jesus and his mother isn’t unusual in Scripture. The Gospel of Luke records that the Blessed Virgin Mary’s cousin Elizabeth is expressing awe and reverence when she asks: “And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (*Lk* 1:43). And a Centurion, seeking healing for his slave who’s at the point of death, says to Jesus: “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed” (*Lk* 7:6-7). This speech of the Centurion’s reflects the attitude with which Catholics should approach Jesus and the sacraments, and for this reason the Church includes it in the Liturgy of the Mass.

Of more interest, perhaps, than Joseph’s motivation or understanding is his actual behavior. Scripture is very clear that once Joseph is told what God expects of him, he obeys the angel immediately: “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (*Mt* 1:24). This puts Joseph in good company with a number of important Old Testament figures, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets—and, in the New Testament, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus himself.

## 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 Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary played in God's plan for salvation.

We see that at the beginning of the New Testament, as at the beginning of the Old, there is a married couple. But whereas Adam and Eve were the source of evil which was unleashed on the world, Joseph and Mary are the summit from which holiness spreads all over the earth. The Savior began the work of salvation by this virginal and holy union, wherein is manifested his all-powerful will to purify and sanctify the family, that sanctuary of love and cradle of life.

—*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.”

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