

Gospel of Matthew

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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.

Matthew Lesson 1 Suggested Responses

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 scorers 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 explains 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 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.’”

Matthew Lesson 1 Suggested Responses

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.