

Suggested Reading

This week you may wish to read the following passages from the Bible.

A Recommended Reading

Matthew 4:23 - 7:29

B Read Carefully

<i>Matthew 5:3-12</i>	<i>The Beatitudes</i>
<i>Matthew 5:17-20</i>	<i>The Law</i>
<i>Matthew 5:21-26</i>	<i>On Anger</i>
<i>Matthew 5:27-30</i>	<i>The Law</i>
<i>Matthew 6:1-8</i>	<i>Almsgiving & Prayer</i>

C Background Reading

i, <i>Matthew 5:21-26 =</i>	<i>Exodus 20:13. Deut 5:17-18</i>
ii, <i>Matthew 5:27-30 =</i>	<i>Exodus 20:14. 24:1</i>
<i>Lev 19:12 / Isa 66:1 / Ps 48:2</i>	<i>Swearing</i>
<i>Ex 21:24 / Lev 24:20 / Deut 19:21</i>	<i>Retaliation</i>
<i>Lev: 19:18 - Deut 18:13</i>	<i>Love of Enemies</i>

D Further Reading

The Catechism of the Catholic Church
Paragraphs 577-582, 1965-1986.

Prayer

O God, who by the pages of both Testaments
Instruct and prepare us to celebrate the Paschal Mystery,
Grant that we may comprehend your mercy,
So that the gifts we receive from you this night
may confirm our hope of the gifts to come.
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Easter Vigil)

PFP v7/2025

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Henley on Thames



The Birth of Jesus according to Matthew. 1

Matthew 1:1 - 2:23



I hope the Christmas Crib has a special place in every home. The influence of St Francis of Assisi has become wonderful mediation of the nativity of Christ. However, in doing so, Francis has placed Luke's Shepherds together in the same stable scene with Matthew's Magi and the traditional Ox and Ass. The humility of the birth of Jesus amongst the poor shepherds (from Luke) is placed with Matthew's concern for the kingship of Jesus, and the worship of Jesus by the Magi. Matthew tells the nativity story from Joseph's point of view. Luke from the point of view of Mary.

The Lectionary at Christmas is also a jumble of stories: we listen the Annunciation to Mary (Luke) in the same breath as the Massacre of the Innocents, or the Flight into Egypt. (Matthew) The result is that like many voices speaking at the same time, we hear none clearly.

When we read the nativity of Matthew or Luke, it is good to read each account separately. The result is that we realise that we have *two* accounts of the nativity of Jesus, which reflect the different priorities and themes of each Evangelist. In many ways the nativity stories act not only as an excellent introduction to each Gospel and Evangelist, but also as a summary of each Gospel.

Matthew Chapter 1.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a most unexpected statement: *'The genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham.'* This is the story of Jesus Christ, but to understand it we must begin with his ancestor: Abraham - *'Abraham was the father of Isaac.'* From this beginning, we can already begin to understand Matthew's preoccupation with the traditions of the Old Testament and his use of the title Son of David.

The story of Jesus is the story of the people of Israel, beginning with the Patriarchs, continuing with the Kings of Israel and the other ancestors of Jesus. The Old Testament is an important part of our story. The genealogy contains an important list of many of the important characters of the Old Testament. This genealogy is different and the better for including the names of women as well. It also reminds us that some of the ancestors of Jesus were people of ill repute.

The rest of Chap. 1 concerns the Annunciation to Joseph. This annunciation also describes the message of angel in a dream, which reveals that Jesus is the Son of God, and the embodiment of Israel's history. At the heart of this message is the revelation that the child has been conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit. Joseph is called 'Son of David' establishing his connection with the genealogy and the messianic promise it contains. Joseph is described as a *'righteous man'* (Mtt 1:19) – which is a very important term in this Gospel. Joseph is as a righteous Jewish man is aware of the demands of the law, and how to apply the compassion and spirit within it. Joseph does not know how the child was conceived. His decision to *'dismiss her quietly'* reveals that he was unwilling to test Mary's innocence before a court as prescribed in the Law of Moses. (Deut 22:20-27). In this sense he wished to avoid 'unwilling to expose her to public disgrace'.

Next Week

The Sermon on the Mount.

Next week we will study the teaching of Jesus beginning with the famous Sermon on the Mount. This is the first and greatest of the five sermons of Jesus recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Its first passage will be instantly recognisable: *The Beatitudes*. I recommend you read these carefully.

Much of this sermon contrasts the law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, with the teaching of Jesus given on a Mountain. Does Jesus reject the Law given by Moses? You may wish to study the Old Testament background to this teaching by reading the quotes suggested overleaf.

One quick way to gain an overview of this section of Gospel might be to consider the subjects that Jesus addresses, especially if they are paragraph headings in your Bible. Are there any common themes? Is this public or personal morality. What does this teaching mean for us today? How could we live it?

The New Catechism offers us a handy overview of the Church's teaching on this subject, and the reflections of the great saints. It is helpful to refer to these paragraphs.

Jesus, the New Moses

Moses, the great prophet and mediator between God and the people of Israel, is the one who enables the people to be set free from slavery and to receive the law. Jesus is rescued from attempt to assassinate him, travels to Egypt, crosses through the water of the Jordan, through the wilderness, and climbs the mountain to teach.

'It is in Jesus that the promise of the new prophet is fulfilled. What is true of Moses in fragmentary form has now been fully realized in the person of Jesus: He lives before the face of God, not just as a friend, but as a Son; he lives in the most intimate unity with the Father'.

Ratzinger, Joseph, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2007) Pg 6

Characteristics of Matthew

One major characteristic of Matthew's Gospel is his extensive use of the Old Testament. He is anxious to demonstrate that the Old Testament is fulfilled in the life of Jesus. *'Fulfilled'* is the word which Matthew uses frequently in his Gospel. There are many direct quotes from the Old Testament at significant moments within the Gospel. Their position in the text serves as an indicator of Matthew's primary concerns.

We can detect parallels and influences which have been drawn from the Old Testament. For example, the person and character of Moses. The Old Testament has also influenced the structure of the Gospel. The teaching of Jesus has been divided into five great sermons which probably reflects the structure of the five books of the Law, the *'Torah'* or *'Pentateuch'*.

Matthew discerns the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in the life of the Jesus. He quotes extensively from the Prophets, who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, whose identity is revealed to a few at his birth, but to all at his death on the Cross.

He is the *'Son of David'*. Matthew uses this title more than the other three Evangelists put together - *10 times*. Jesus is the *'Son of God'*, this is the central description of the person of Jesus. He is the promised Messiah, the Son of David who has come to the people of Israel, but is not accepted, while (mysteriously) he is accepted by the Gentiles as the Son of God.

Jesus is the Messiah who reveals God's kingdom. This is the subject of many of the sermons throughout the Gospel. Matthew stresses the role of the Church. He mentions it twice (*Mtt 16:18 & 18:18*) the only times in any of the Gospels. The fourth sermon of Matthew's Gospel addresses the Church community. (*Chap. 18*) At its conclusion, the Gospel reminds us that it is the Church, made from the people of Israel and the Gentiles, who are the new people of God.

However, Joseph listens to, and acts upon, the Angel's message both of which are much more difficult in the light of day. Joseph establishes Jesus' place in Jewish law, and through him, the genealogy of the Son of David.

Jesus, the one who will save his people from their sins, fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah (*Isa 7:14*). He is *'Emmanuel = God is with us.'* (*Mtt 1:23*) This revelation is one of the major themes of the Gospel, which reaches its climax with the last verse of the Gospel: *'I am with you always, till the end of time.'* (*Mtt 28:20*) After the resurrection, Jesus will be present with his Church for all time.

Matthew Chapter 2

These strangers from the East, help us to understand the universal nature of salvation, and that God is made manifest through the presence of a child, born in a manger. This is a story of contradictions and misunderstandings. The Magi know when the Infant King of the Jews will be born, but not where – so naturally, they go to the Palace in Jerusalem. The Jewish scribes know where – the city of David: Bethlehem; but not when. Each holds separate pieces of the puzzle, but put together, the Magi are enabled to find the King, in a manger.

The gifts – Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh – are mystic gifts with mystic meaning. Gold represents Kingship, Frankincense represents priesthood, Myrrh is used to anoint a corpse – the women bring myrrh to the tomb – and represents that our salvation will be achieved by Jesus' death on the Cross. These gifts reveal Jesus to be our King, Priest and Saviour. Finally, having followed the Star, the Magi return home by a different route, frustrating Herod's attempt to kill the child. This can also represent how an encounter with Jesus can change lives and how it marks a new way of life.

Joseph, a man of dreams, flees to Egypt, reminiscent of his namesake Joseph. Herod is a carbon copy of the wicked Pharaoh who killed all the Hebrew male children. Jesus, like Moses is saved by God, to be the one, who in turn will save his people.

The Book of Numbers presented Balaam as one from the East who could say, 'I see him, but not in the present; I perceive him, but not close at hand: a star issues from Jacob' (Num 24:17), since the star would not arise from Jacob until David's time. Similarly, the Magi, see the star of the King of the Jews rising, this will not be revealed in its entirety until the King of the Jews is revealed on the Cross. He is Emmanuel, God with us, but it is only after his resurrection that his presence will be with us until the end of time.

IN choosing to be born for us, God chose to be known by us. He therefore reveals himself in this way, in order that this great sacrament of his love may not be an occasion for us of great misunderstanding.

Today the magi find, crying in a manger, the one they have followed as he shone in the sky. Today the magi see clearly, in swaddling clothes, the one they have long awaited as he lay hidden among the stars.

Today the magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, humanity in God, God in humanity, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body. As they look, they believe and do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die. . . .

Today Christ enters the Jordan to wash away the sin of the world. John himself testifies that this is why he has come: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. . . .

Today Christ works the first of his signs from heaven by turning water into wine. But water [mixed with wine] has still to be changed into the sacrament of his blood, so that Christ may offer spiritual drink from the chalice of his body.

Peter Chrysologus
Fifth century
Office of Readings
Roman rite

The Gospel of St Matthew.

Structure of the Gospel.

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| Matthew 1:1 - 4:22 | The Birth of Jesus and beginning of his ministry.
Infancy Narratives, Baptism & call of disciples. |
| Matthew 4:23 - 7:29 | The Sermon on the Mount
The Teaching of Jesus.
The first sermon: The Beatitudes |
| Matthew 8:1 - 10:42 | The Mission Sermon.
Jesus Ministry in Galilee.
The second sermon: The Mission Sermon |
| Matthew 11:1 - 13:52 | The Parables of the Kingdom
Jesus rejected in Galilee.
The third sermon: The Parable of the Sower. |
| Matthew 13:53 - 18:35 | The Church: God's Kingdom on Earth.
Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah.
The fourth sermon: The Community Sermon. |
| Matthew 19:1 - 25:46 | First part of Holy Week:
Jesus enters Jerusalem: Teaching in the Temple.
The fifth Sermon: The Final Sermon. |
| Matthew 26:1 - 28:20 | Second part of Holy Week:
The Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus |

The Gospel of Matthew is commonly understood to have been written in a Jewish environment possibly in Galilee or southern Syria (Antioch) about 80 - 90 AD. The Gospel has a Jewish-Christian character. However, it also reflects the growing conflict and antipathy between the early Jewish Christian communities and Judaism. This represents the beginning of a parting of the ways. Matthew's Gospel is heavily dependent upon the Gospel of Mark. 600 of the 661 verses of Mark are found within Matthew's Gospel. Added to this Matthew has other material, some of which he shares with Luke.