



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

Matthew Part 1

MATTHEW 1:1–13:52

LEADERS GUIDE



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Contents

Introducing the LifeLight Program	5
Session 1—Presenter Preparing to Study Matthew	9
Session 2—Presenter Introducing Jesus the Messiah Matthew 1–2	14
Session 3—Presenter Proclaiming That the Kingdom Is at Hand Matthew 3–4	19
Session 4—Presenter Teaching Kingdom Living Matthew 5:1–6:18	24
Session 5—Presenter Seeking Only His Kingdom Matthew 6:19–7:29	30
Session 6—Presenter Presenting Jesus as Messiah through His Miracles Matthew 8:1–9:34	35
Session 7—Presenter Sending the Disciples on His Mission Matthew 9:35–10:42	41
Session 8—Presenter Jesus the Messiah Meets Growing Opposition Matthew 11–12	47
Session 9—Presenter Unlocking Secrets of the Kingdom through Parables Matthew 13:1–52	53
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *	
Session 1—Small-Group Leaders Preparing to Study Matthew	61
Session 2—Small-Group Leaders Introducing Jesus the Messiah Matthew 1–2	65
Session 3—Small-Group Leaders Proclaiming That the Kingdom Is at Hand Matthew 3–4	68
Session 4—Small-Group Leaders Teaching Kingdom Living Matthew 5:1–6:18	72
Session 5—Small-Group Leaders Seeking Only His Kingdom Matthew 6:19–7:29	76
Session 6—Small-Group Leaders Presenting Jesus as Messiah through His Miracles Matthew 8:1–9:34	81
Session 7—Small-Group Leaders Sending the Disciples on His Mission Matthew 9:35–10:42	85
Session 8—Small-Group Leaders Jesus the Messiah Meets Growing Opposition Matthew 11–12	89
Session 9—Small-Group Leaders Unlocking Secrets of the Kingdom through Parables Matthew 13:1–52	93

Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

Anticipated LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will

be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth form of Bible study employed by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- reports LifeLight activities and plans to the district's board of parish education, to the congregation(s), and to the district LifeLight director;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the

director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Presenter

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the presenter begins on p. 9.**) The presenter

- prepares and presents the Bible study to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and materials of the presenter's own choosing;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator

(optional; the director may fill this role)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership team and discussion leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 65.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion

leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 65**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. Since LifeLight is a 1½ hour weekday program, with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings, some congregations may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the presenter and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The great effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week-by-week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains a hymn, prayer, and other worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's

assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.

2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule, but they may use the CD-ROM to join in singing the opening hymn and use a cassette tape to listen to the week's lecture presentation. The tape and leaflets will be obtained from the director by the discussion leader.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by reviewing the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Matthew

Albrecht, G. Jerome and Michael J. *Matthew: People's Bible Commentary*. St. Louis: CPH, 1996. Includes NIV text plus commentary. 445 pages.

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: CPH, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and time lines.

Franzmann, Martin H. *Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew*. St. Louis: CPH, 1961. Reprint. Concordia Heritage Series, 1982. Now out of print, this classic by Professor Franzmann is a running exposition of Matthew's Gospel.

Lenski, R. C. H. *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*. Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1932, 1943. This older volume is a reliable, comprehensive, confessionally-sound commentary by a Lutheran theologian.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: CPH, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages.

Preparing to Study Matthew

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God reveals the way of salvation to us through His Word. Through study of the authorship, message, structure, and unique characteristics of Matthew, we grow in our understanding of God's great love for us.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. understand in a preliminary way the authorship, message, structure, and outline of Matthew's Gospel;
2. appreciate the many blessings received through Jesus and the blessings given by God through the writers of the Gospels;
3. seek ongoing spiritual growth through the study of Matthew.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on p. 61.

For the Presenter

Have you watched a young child work with a jigsaw puzzle? What did you see? Perhaps the child chose pieces randomly and attempted to fit them together. In many cases such attempts end in frustration. As children mature, they learn to look at the picture on the box before they begin. The "big picture" shows them where to place pieces with particular colors or designs.

This first session uses the "big picture" approach to lead into a study of Matthew's Gospel. Participants will see how one part of the book connects with preceding and following parts, as well as with the Old Testament and

the other parts of the New Testament. These connections often serve as links that help participants better understand the messages God gives in this Gospel.

Let the Holy Spirit open your heart to more of His truth as He prepares you to share it with those to whom you will speak. Remember that those privileged by God's grace to share His Good News of salvation in Christ must take that privilege seriously and assume it with much enthusiasm. As you prepare, pray, and present, ask the Lord to work in you an attitude of humility. Expect Him to empower you to be His ambassador—that is what you truly are!

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn. Follow with the devotion and the prayer printed in the study leaflet. Note that accompaniment for the hymn can be found on the CD-ROM that accompanies this course. If you plan to use it, find it on the disk and cue it up for easy use.

Devotion

Place yourself into the sandals of Matthew's first readers. Four centuries had passed since the last Old Testament events. Their church leaders seemed to think Jesus had come to destroy the Law and the Prophets—the Old Testament writings.

Into this world Matthew, by divine inspiration, clearly demonstrates the opposite. Jesus came to *fulfill* what God had promised in the Old Testament. Christianity is not a new religion to replace Judaism; it fulfills the promises God had made to His people, even going as far back as the Garden of Eden. By the power of the Holy Spirit these first readers learned to know Jesus for who He is—the Savior of the world.

Lecture Presentation

This lecture also appears on the CD-ROM that accompanies this course. Also look at the PDFFILES directory on the CD-ROM for overhead transparency graphics for the course.

Introduction

Today is a very special day. We are joining together to study another portion of God's Word—Matthew, the very first book in the New Testament. Through the inspired Word we are going to be pointed to the manger. We will watch the Lord walk through some of His earthly ministry. We will follow Him to the cross and the grave. We will rejoice to see Him return to life on Easter morning. Finally, we will witness His ascension into heaven from the Mount of Olives.

To make this as meaningful as possible will require some intensive study on your part. You will also benefit from the support and input of your small group. And you will need to spend time in prayer, asking that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to the saving message before you.

1. Understanding Matthew's Authorship

We plunge into the Gospel of Matthew. Before you begin your study of chapter 1, verse 1, a few comments may serve to prepare you for your in-depth study. We need to move into the first-century world and try to think like the biblical authors. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each wrote a Gospel in which they present Jesus as the Savior. Through an account of His life and teaching, they present the true historical record so that the Messiah may enter people's lives as the saving Christ. Each writer, from his unique perspective, presents different facets of the Gospel, opening its richness and fullness to us. We begin with the special accents of Matthew's Gospel.

Generally in the early church, Matthew, the tax collector, was regarded as the author of the first Gospel. Early church fathers from the second and third centuries, including Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaeus, and Origen, identify Matthew as the author.

The text of Matthew's Gospel provides some clues about its authorship. Matthew was one of the 12 disciples, called by Jesus from his tax collector's booth to follow the Master. In the lists of disciples in Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:14–19; and Luke 6:13–16, only Matthew's list refers to him as a tax collector—perhaps a personal touch by the author that pointed out God's grace in calling him. In the parallel accounts of the calling of Matthew to be a disciple (Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), Mark and Luke use his more formal name, Levi, while Matthew employs the name Matthew, which means "gift of God."

A tax collector's knowledge of finances might explain Matthew's account of the payment of tribute to Caesar (22:15–22), where he uses the technical term for "tribute money," *nomisma* in the Greek, whereas both Mark (12:13–17) and Luke (20:20–26) use the term for a common coin (*denarius*). Similarly, only Matthew records the incident of the annual temple tax (17:24–27). A tax collector's orderly mind might also explain Matthew's careful structuring of the Gospel into groups of five major discourses. As you study this Gospel in detail, think of Matthew, the tax collector, and how God chose him by grace to be Jesus' disciple.

2. Understanding Matthew's Original Audience

Matthew addressed his Gospel primarily to Jewish Christians, as the text clearly indicates. He shows how God fulfilled His plan to send the world's Messiah through the chosen people, the Jews. Matthew's genealogy (1:1–17) traces Jesus' ancestry to Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, and to David, the great king, whereas Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:23–38) goes all the way back to Adam, the father of the human race.

Matthew refers to many Jewish customs without explanation, whereas Mark feels constrained to explain some of these customs for his Gentile readers. For example, Matthew simply asks in 15:2, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Mark, on the other hand, in 7:2–4, goes into a detailed explanation of the practice of the Jews. Similarly, Matthew mentions "phylacteries" in 23:5 with no further explanation that they are small

leather boxes containing passages from the Old Testament and worn by Jews on the arm or on the forehead during prayer. He could assume that his audience knew and understood the term.

Matthew also frequently quotes from the Old Testament. Ten of the 29 Old Testament prophecies included in his Gospel are unique to Matthew. Certainly Jewish readers could relate more directly to the Old Testament.

3. Understanding Matthew's Message

Matthew's main purpose for writing is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Again and again, he makes that point through the genealogy (1:1–17) and the messianic titles—Son of David (1:1), Immanuel (1:23), Son of Man (8:20; 9:6), Servant (12:18), and so forth. While the Messiah is described in Old Testament terms for Jewish readers, *He clearly came for the whole world—women and men, lepers and centurions, Magi from the east. His disciples are sent to all nations.*

Display overhead 1A from the CD-ROM here.

Matthew also presents Jesus as Israel's Redeemer and Substitute before God. The early events of Jesus' life parallel Israel of old. Jesus and His parents fled to Egypt to escape death from Herod, even as Jacob and his family fled to Egypt to escape death from famine. Herod killed the male children of Bethlehem, just as Pharaoh killed the male children of the Israelites. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan; Israel passed through the Red Sea and so was "baptized," as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:1–2. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness; Israel was also tempted to distrust God during its wilderness wanderings. Israel received the Law from God at Sinai; Jesus taught a pure understanding of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount.

Look for some of these comparisons as you study the early chapters of Matthew. Understanding these parallels will underline the truth that Jesus came to redeem God's people by His own substitutionary obedience and sacrifice, taking our place under the Law. You will also observe how Jesus calls His church, beginning with

His disciples, and instructs them for mission in the world. Gentiles too will receive God's call to repentance and God's grace in Jesus. In this way Gentiles will be grafted into Israel, which will now consist of all those who share the faith of Abraham, regardless of race or heritage.

Display overhead 1B from the CD-ROM here.

Matthew emphasizes that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The Messiah leads His followers into His kingdom. He comes as a King who serves. He summons to repentance, performs miracles of healing, forgives sins, and incurs growing opposition to His message and life. He sends out the disciples on His kingdom mission. He goes as a King with a crown of thorns to the cross, where He dies, forsaken by the Father. He rises triumphantly as King, and with all authority in heaven and on earth, He sends His followers to make disciples of all nations. He describes His return as King at the Last Day.

As you study, realize also that in the Jewish mind of that day Moses and King David were the two most prominent figures of the Old Testament era. For this reason Matthew frequently compares and contrasts each one to Jesus, showing that Jesus was greater than both of these heroes of faith.

4. Understanding Matthew's Structure

Matthew is carefully structured around five great discourses—the Sermon on the Mount (5–7), Sending out the Disciples on a Mission (10), Parables of the Kingdom (13), Relationships in the Church (18), and Judgment (24–25). Each discourse is introduced by a narrative section that describes Jesus' ministry from Bethlehem to Calvary and to the mountain in Galilee where He ascended from earth to heaven.

Matthew organizes his material topically in threes, fives, and sevens. For example, the genealogy of Jesus (1:1–17) contains three major divisions. The Sermon on the Mount contains three illustrations of hypocrisy and pure piety (6:1–18). The Kingdom parables contain three parables of planting and growth (13:1–32). Jesus' words are organized in five major discourses

(5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25). The Sermon on the Mount supplies five examples showing the full intention of God's Law (5:21–48). The Kingdom parable chapter features seven parables (13), and seven woes are pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees (23:13–36).

5. Comparisons with Mark, Luke, and John

Imagine a collage made of four unique crosses. Each cross has characteristics of its own. Together the crosses form a collage that incorporates characteristics of all four. In a similar way, each of the four Gospels is unique and presents to us the way of salvation. Together, they provide a more complete picture of the life and work of Jesus.

Matthew provides a clear message that Jesus is the Messiah promised throughout the Old Testament. With simple, succinct, unadorned, yet vivid accounts of Jesus' ministry, Mark emphasizes Jesus' actions more than His teachings. Luke provides an orderly account of Jesus' ministry, written with a warm, sensitive understanding of Jesus and those around Him. John includes several long discourses of Jesus, emphasizing His teachings more than His actions. Together, the four Gospels provide a message of salvation for all.

6. The LifeLight Adventure

Many of you have begun another LifeLight adventure. Others are beginning a new adventure. The journey will not always be easy. The course calls for disciplined, regular study so that God can work His message in your heart.

At times you will not feel like studying. Other demands will crowd your schedule. A given study period may yield exciting insights and rich rewards or may seem dull and uninteresting. Your group discussion may encourage you greatly or make you feel inadequate. The lecture may thrill or seem not very helpful. Our sinful nature will combine with Satan's onslaught to derail the LifeLight program in our midst.

But God's Spirit is stronger still. God has promised that His Word will not return to Him void but will accom-

plish His purpose. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. Where two or three gather in Jesus' name, He is present in their midst. These precious Gospel promises from God's Word undergird your participation in LifeLight.

Some words from Matthew seem quite fitting as you begin your study. Ponder these:

5:6—Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

6:20—Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

6:33—Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

7:7—Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

7:24—Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

9:2—Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.

10:39—Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

11:25—I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

11:28—Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

13:8–9—Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.

We begin the LifeLight adventure together with Jesus the Messiah!

Concluding Activities

Encourage participants to set a weekly plan for their LifeLight study. A consistent daily schedule works best for most. The time of the day depends upon the individual and circumstances. Some begin or end the day with LifeLight. Others find another time during the day at home or during a break or lunch hour at work. Invite participants to share their practices, especially if your

group contains individuals new to LifeLight.

Distribute study leaflet 2 and the enrichment magazine. Encourage participants to read the first three articles in the enrichment magazine, pages 2–8. You may also want to print and distribute copies of the CD-ROM articles “The Gospel according to Matthew” and “Time Line—Abraham to Christ.”

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Notes

Introducing Jesus the Messiah

Matthew 1–2

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The first two chapters of Matthew introduce Jesus as the Messiah through the Old Testament genealogy and the account of His birth. His Davidic lineage and worship by the Magi as King of the Jews underscore His royal mission to save His people from their sins. His inclusive kingdom embraces sinners such as David, women such as Rahab and Ruth, and other Gentiles such as the Magi.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit’s help, will be led to

1. understand Jesus as the obedient Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament promises (genealogy and Old Testament prophecies);
2. embrace Jesus the Messiah as Savior from sin;
3. worship Jesus as King with heart, voice, and life.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on p. 65.

For the Presenter

Your major responsibility will continue to be the presentation of the lecture. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the lecture printed in this leaders guide so you will be able to present the lecture effectively in your own style. *If you read the lecture from the guide*, practice reading it many times, so that you will be able to look up from the text and maintain eye contact with your audience without losing your place. Be free with the text so that you can present it in a natural way. Also add notes of your own as you prepare the presentation.

Strive to keep the lecture an integral part of the whole in-depth study. Be part of a small-group discussion yourself, and keep communicating with discussion leaders to determine which areas of the week’s study should be stressed in the lecture. The lecture serves as a review of the week’s study; therefore, keep the lecture attuned to what has been occurring in previous phases of the week’s study.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and the prayer printed in the study leaflet. Follow with the devotion. Note that accompaniment for the hymn can be found on the CD-ROM that accompanies this course. If you plan to use it, find it on the disk and cue it up for easy use.

Devotion

What questions do you ask when you are deciding how to vote in a national election? Each candidate will claim to be most qualified. You will examine them and vote for the one who, in your opinion, has the *best* qualifications.

Matthew gets right to the point as he tells about Jesus’ qualifications: “*the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matthew 1:1). Immediately the readers knew that Matthew was telling about the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world, your Savior, my Savior. Surely He deserves all the praise we give Him!

Lecture Presentation

This lecture also appears on the CD-ROM that accompanies this course. Also look at the PDFFILES directory on the CD-ROM for overhead transparency graphics for the course.

Introduction

How would you introduce Jesus Christ to a modern audience? Would you use a media event with an enthu-

siastic crowd of supporters to applaud? Would you develop a series of powerful television commercials with just the right music and imagery? Or would you hold a quiet worship service with simple words from the Bible and focus on the cross?

Probably you would not write a Gospel beginning with a genealogy of 42 names as the most effective means to identify Jesus as the promised Messiah. But then, Matthew was not writing initially to Madison Avenue ad executives, Southern California sunbathers and surfers, or for that matter, Roman citizens in Corinth. He was addressing a Jewish audience with a powerful message designed to transform their lives forever. That message of Matthew 1 and 2, properly understood with its rich Old Testament background, can transform our lives as well. Through our careful daily study of the first two chapters, we have seen Matthew *introducing Jesus as the Messiah!*

1. Through His Genealogy (1:1–17)

Display overhead 2A from the CD-ROM here.

Matthew begins with the words, “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.” The Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* both mean “the anointed—or chosen—one.” When Jesus is called Christ, the text is saying that He is the One chosen by God. Immediately Matthew identifies Jesus with David, the Bethlehem-born great king of Israel, and with Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation. Jewish readers listen carefully for more news. Long awaiting a promised Messiah from David’s royal line, they want to learn more about Jesus.

Display overhead 2B from the CD-ROM here.

The unfolding genealogy only quickens their interest—Abraham first and then the familiar names of Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. What a proud heritage! God’s chosen people brought to a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey! Would they have blinked their eyes at the mention of Rahab, the harlot, and Ruth, a Gentile woman?

There are 14 names to David, the pinnacle of God’s rule in Israel’s history. Under David’s rule, Israel established

wide boundaries, achieved military victory, and enjoyed national prosperity. The genealogy moves on to another list of 14 names—Solomon, the wise king and temple builder (though the mention of Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, as Solomon’s mother calls attention to David’s adultery), then a list of kings revealing the darker side of Judah’s history down to the Babylonian exile. A final listing of 14 names leads to “Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”

The inclusion of the Gentile women Rahab and Ruth in the genealogy clearly communicates an important truth: Jesus has come for the whole world, for women and men, for Jews and Gentiles. Since Luke addressed a Gentile audience, his genealogy (Luke 3:23–38) traces Jesus back to Adam, the father of the human race. As Paul tells us in Romans 4:16, all children of faith are children of Abraham. So we can join Matthew’s original Jewish audience in joyfully praising God for His faithful promises to His people of old, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

2. Through His Birth (1:18–25)

Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth would make more sense to a Jewish audience than to Gentiles. Mary was betrothed to Joseph. No sexual relations were permitted during a Jewish betrothal, although the engagement could only be broken by a divorce. Nevertheless Mary, a virgin, became pregnant by God’s action “through the Holy Spirit” (v. 18). Now Joseph faced a dilemma. By Jewish law he had the right to bring his fiancée before a court of law to prove her infidelity; this could result in her being stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:23–24). Or he could break the marriage contract by divorcing her quietly (v. 19). Joseph must have agonized over his decision because he loved Mary and was a just man.

Now Matthew introduces Jesus as the Messiah in two ways. First, he relates the appearance of an angel of the Lord to Joseph in a dream. God is acting to assure that His plan of salvation will go forward. Similar dream messages are recorded in chapter 2, where the Magi are warned to return to their own land another way (2:12), and Joseph is first warned to flee to Egypt with Mary

and the infant Jesus (2:13) and then instructed to return to Israel (vv. 19–20).

In this first angelic visit Joseph was told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because the conception of the Messiah was the work of the Holy Spirit. The angel described the Messiah's saving mission, saying (v. 21), "You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

Second, Matthew begins a series of quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures to demonstrate beyond a doubt that the birth of Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy. Note also Matthew 2:5–6, 15, 17–18, and 23. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" (1:23). *Immanuel* means "God with us." In every situation we can rely upon His presence and power.

The text affirms that Joseph "had no union with her until she gave birth to a son" (v. 25). The virgin conception of Jesus clearly marks his messianic identity and mission. With God as His only Father, Jesus is true God. But with Mary as His mother, Jesus is also true man. Jesus would save His people from their sins by living a perfect life in our stead under God's Law and suffering and dying in our place. Only a God-man could save us. Truly, Jesus the Messiah is "God with us." By faith we embrace Him as our Savior from sin.

3. Through the Visit of the Magi (2:1–12)

Stirring news—the arrival in Jerusalem of dignitaries from the east! The text does not tell us how many Magi there were; no doubt they were wise men or astrologers—not kings—from Persia or southern Arabia. They came seeking the one "born king of the Jews" (v. 2). Messianic expectations abounded because of their visit. They had seen His star in its rising. It has been suggested that this star was produced by some unusual conjunction of planets, such as Saturn and Jupiter, or by a special comet. The Magi had come to worship Him. Because Israel was once held captive in the east for an entire generation (70 years), these Magi may have heard the Messiah spoken about as the "Star

of Jacob," a reference based on Numbers 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob."

These Gentile Magi came to worship the newborn king of the Jews, but their arrival greatly upset King Herod, and a disturbed Herod greatly troubled all Jerusalem, for Herod the Great was known for his vindictiveness. Why, he had murdered his own wife and other members of his family! He was determined to leave no room for pretenders to his throne. A wily man, he asked his chief priests and teachers where the Messiah was to be born. These advisors searched the Scriptures and discovered the answer in Micah 5:2. In Matthew the passage is quoted in this way (2:6): "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel." Clearly, Bethlehem signaled the birth of Jesus as the Son of David, the promised Messiah.

Herod sent the Magi on their way to Bethlehem, deceitfully requesting that they report back to him so that he might also worship the child. How interesting! The all-sufficient Word of God can either be used for information to serve our manipulative purposes, as in Herod's case, or it can shape our lives with its saving message, as in the case of the Magi. We must listen with discernment to those who claim to give messages from God. Through the study of God's Word He equips us to do so.

Next we see the beautiful result of God's grace in the lives of these Gentile Wise Men. God had led them by the star and by the reliable Word of God to the house where Mary and Joseph lived with Jesus. Note that they found Him in a house, no longer in a manger, as in Luke 2:7, 12, and 16. This suggests that Mary and Joseph had been in Bethlehem long enough to find a more permanent residence. Perhaps they were staying in Bethlehem until the new mother and newborn infant were strong enough to travel back to Nazareth. Believing in Jesus as Messiah, the Magi were "overjoyed" (v. 10), "bowed down and worshiped Him" (v. 11), and gave Him extravagant gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh (v. 11). Isaiah 60:1–6 prophesied that Gentiles would come with gifts to Israel because they saw God's saving light shining in the darkness. These Magi

rejoiced in the presence of the King of the Jews. They worshiped Him and freely gave their very best to Him.

How this account must have affected Matthew's Jewish readers! Gentiles were welcomed into the messianic kingdom while Jewish leaders, with Herod, were disturbed about a pretender to the throne! How thrilling this account becomes for us who are Gentile Christians! For although—like the Magi—we did not belong to Israel by birth, we—like the Magi—have been guided by the light of God's Word to Jesus!

As baptized children of God, saved by grace, we also rejoice with exceeding great joy. Ask yourself, Do I also bow down and worship the King? Do I also freely give Him my costliest treasures? What tremendous implications there are in this passage for Christian worship, evangelism, and stewardship! "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you" (Isaiah 60:1).

4. Through His Escape to Egypt and Return to Nazareth (2:13–23)

Warned by God in a dream, the Magi avoided Herod and returned home by a different route. God intervened again, speaking to Joseph in a dream, and instructed the holy family to escape to Egypt because Herod planned to kill the child.

Now Matthew quotes an Old Testament passage of great significance for understanding Jesus as the Messiah, "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called My son'" (Matthew 2:15, quoting Hosea 11:1). When you study the context of this quotation from Hosea, you realize that there God was referring to Israel as His son, called out of Egypt under Moses, led safely through the Red Sea, brought through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Yet, Israel often rebelled against God and sacrificed to Baal. Israel deserved God's judgment on its sin.

Consider the tremendous implications as this Old Testament quotation is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Matthew presents Jesus as the *obedient Israel* of God and the *new Moses*. Jesus, called out of Egypt, "crosses" the Jordan River in His Baptism, and wins the victory over Satan in His wilderness temptations. He teaches the full expres-

sion of the Sinai Law in His Sermon on the Mount. His sayings and words, in five major units, parallel the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch). But Jesus' mission is more than teaching and miracles; throughout Matthew He moves confidently and purposefully toward the cross and empty tomb. As you continue your study of Matthew, look for additional examples of Jesus as the obedient Israel.

Herod, meanwhile, vented His rage at the Magi's secret departure by ordering the slaughter of all boys under two years of age in the vicinity of Bethlehem, in this way attempting to include every boy born since the star first appeared to the Magi. How many little boys were murdered? It doesn't really matter, does it? What an atrocity committed by this tyrant Herod as he attempted to protect his throne!

The Old Testament quotation from Jeremiah you studied carefully during the week describes Rachel weeping for her children (Jeremiah 31:15). How appropriate that Matthew would refer to Rachel weeping for her children; Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19–20), where the innocent children were slaughtered. But the reference brings out a far more important insight. Herod's slaughter of the innocents reveals the horror of rebellion against God, a rebellion also displayed by Israel in Jeremiah's day.

All of us weep at the dreadful effects of sin in the world. Sin causes all around us to look dark and hopeless. But God has acted in Bethlehem, scarred by atrocity and horror, by sending His own Son to bring life and hope. That Son lived safely in Egypt and would return to Nazareth where He would prepare for His saving mission. Because of His death on the cross for our sin, His triumphant resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven, He will one day return to wipe all tears from our eyes. Jesus brings comfort to our grieving, repentant hearts and helps us to bring hope to a world filled with horrible events like Herod's slaughter of the innocent children.

After the death of Herod the Great, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and instructed him to return with Jesus to the "land of Israel" (v. 20), again a reference to the new Moses going to the Promised

Land. However, Joseph did not settle in Judea, because Herod's son Archelaus was ruling there. Instead he went to Galilee to a town called Nazareth. While another son of Herod, Antipas, ruled in Galilee, perhaps this small obscure village far removed from Bethlehem was considered safer for the child. After all, in John 1:46, Nathanael asks, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" The collective quotation from the prophets (v. 23), "He will be called a Nazarene," is unclear as to its reference and meaning. Perhaps a reference is intended to Isaiah 11:1 where the word *branch* (*netzer* in Hebrew) is used, a branch which will grow out of the root of Jesse. This messianic reference would certainly fit Matthew's purpose of *introducing Jesus as the Messiah*.

Conclusion

The journey through Matthew's Gospel has begun. You have completed a week of personal study. Your small group has wrestled together with the results of your study. God is speaking to us in a special way. New facts are being digested. But, more than this, God is reaching our hearts with His Word and leading us to examine our daily lives as well. We depend on each other, and most of all, we depend on God's Holy Spirit to guide and empower us through this in-depth study of Matthew.

Certainly, we now better understand Jesus as the new Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament promises. We embrace Jesus the Messiah as Savior from sin. And like the Magi, we joyfully worship Jesus as King with heart, voice, and life.

Concluding Activities

Distribute study leaflet 3. You may want to duplicate and distribute the article "Matthew: Jesus and the New Israel" from the CD-ROM. The map "Journey to Bethlehem, Flight to Egypt, and Return to Nazareth" may also prove helpful to participants.

Notes