



CONCORDIA COMMENTARY
BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Daniel E. Paavola





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Written by Daniel E. Paavola

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PARTICIPANT GUIDE

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?

For decades, the Concordia Commentary series has been a blessing to pastors, church workers, and readers around the world. Drawing from great theologians and experts in biblical languages and Lutheran tradition, the many volumes of this series have helped illuminate God's Word to countless Christians. The Concordia Commentaries are extensive in length and offer great depth of study.

This Bible study series pulls excerpts and ideas from the Concordia Commentaries to bring these treasures to you individually or in your group Bible study. Consider these Bible studies to be guided tours of the books of the Bible by experts. Though not exhaustive, this study will help you better understand key themes and insights that only commentary authors can give.

We hope this Bible study deepens your understanding of God's Word, builds within you a desire to dig deeper into God's Word, and helps you more clearly see your Savior, Jesus Christ.



PARTICIPANT GUIDE FOR SESSION 1

WHO IS JESUS?

Primary Text: Matthew 1

Key Takeaways

The opening verses of Matthew assure us that Jesus has come at precisely the correct time, as seen in His fulfillment of the three sets of His genealogy. We find the Savior of the world at the completion of the lines of Abraham and David. Jesus comes not only as the Son of Abraham and Son of David but as the anointed Savior, the Christ, the Son of God. Then we know He is also the Immanuel, the God with us, present not to condemn the world but to save us.

Opening Prayer/Hymn

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to be born among us. You give us the certainty that He has come as foretold, the joyful completion of the long line from Abraham and David. He is the Son of David, the Son of God, and the Savior of the entire world. Keep us in this faith that we might know who He is and what He has done for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn Suggestion: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," especially verses 1, 4, and 5 (*LSB* 357)

Introducing the Lesson

Matthew begins his Gospel in a surprising way. Instead of starting with a striking story, he gives us the genealogy of Jesus, stretching from Abraham to Jesus. This is the foundation for our understanding of who Jesus is. After we trace His lineage, we are ready to hear of His birth and the purpose of His coming. He is Jesus, the Savior of the world!

Opening Questions: Who do you know who is always on time, who you never have to wait for or worry whether they're coming? How does the arrival of Jesus come at exactly the right time, being born from exactly the right people?

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Historical Considerations

Our first consideration concerns the identity of the author of the book of Matthew. The Concordia Commentary author on Matthew, Jeffrey Gibbs, gives this summary supporting the traditional view that the Gospel was written by Matthew, the former tax collector who was called by Jesus to be one of the twelve disciples:

The uniform testimony of early church writers (such as it is) and the hard evidence of the manuscript titles alone make the traditional view of authorship by Matthew of Capernaum far and away the most likely. The arguments against that view have remarkably little substance. It is true that historical certainty eludes us; we cannot prove that Matthew was the author. Nor does confessional faithfulness require that we conclude that he wrote our first canonical Gospel, since the text of the Gospel nowhere claims such authorship. Nevertheless, the most likely answer to the question of authorship is that the testimony of the early church is to be trusted. By the grace of Christ, the despised tax gatherer became a disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ. Even more, he became the author of the Gospel that bears his name. (Gibbs, 63)

The next consideration is the date of Matthew's writing. It is challenging to fix an exact date, but we can see Matthew as preceding the Gospel of Luke, which is often dated as written around AD 60. Therefore, Matthew might be dated around AD 55. Again, Gibbs gives this summary as to the date of writing:

Since Luke composed his Gospel before writing Acts, his Gospel was written perhaps in the last part of the 50s. The Gospel of Luke is acknowledged by its own author to have been written after others had set their hands to similar tasks (Luke 1:1-4), which suggests that Matthew and Mark may already have been written. It is not at

all unreasonable, then, to suggest that the Synoptic Gospels arose out of the common apostolic teaching and were composed during the decade of the 50s. . . . So we may cautiously, yet with some confidence, assign a date of AD 55 to the writing of the Gospel according to Matthew, remembering that the uniform testimony of the early church indicates that Matthew, though not thought to be the *source* for Mark and Luke, was the first of the three to be written. (Gibbs, 66)

Finally, we might ask *where* Matthew wrote the Gospel. The most likely location is somewhere in Palestine, though it is not certain. Gibbs gives this direction:

If, however, this commentator is pressed for a response to the question “Whence this Gospel?” I believe a location in Palestine, in harmony with early church testimony, would serve as well as any. This view, however, really depends in large measure upon my prior conclusions that Matthew of Capernaum was the actual author and that the Gospel was likely written in the AD 50s. (Gibbs, 67)

Theological Considerations

READING 1: MATTHEW 1:1–17 JESUS’ THREE TITLES

KEY INSIGHTS FOR READING 1

To begin the Gospel, Matthew records three titles of Jesus. Each gives a distinct facet of the nature of Jesus and His ministry. The sequence of the three titles allows the second and third titles to build on the previous one. Gibbs wraps these three titles into one purpose:

The opening line of the Gospel speaks volumes about what will come in the pages that follow. . . . It is the account of the words and deeds of a man, Jesus of Nazareth. In Him, whose very name evokes the saving purpose (1:21) for His origin and His ministry in Israel, God has come near and in a new way begun the last days of judgment and salvation for Israel and for all people. Matthew begins his Gospel with an account of “the origin of Jesus.” At the beginning he prominently displays three “titles” that say much (though not everything!) about the significance of Jesus. (Gibbs, 72–73)

Perhaps the most recognized title is “Christ.” The Christ is the anointed Messiah, the chosen Savior sent by God to redeem the world. Jesus’ arrival announces that the kingdom of God has come, even at the beginning of His ministry. As the Christ, Jesus is the sole hope of the world’s salvation, as Gibbs notes:

In an age of increasing religious pluralism, where truth is deemed relative and diversity is the greatest prize, Matthew’s Gospel proclaims that Jesus and none other is the one whom the Father has anointed as Savior. In addition, the world ever and always resists the kind of Messiah that Jesus has come to be, namely, one who comes to the helpless in order to save them from their sin (see 1:21), not merely to assist or advise them how to improve or to enrich their lives with fulfillment. Yet this is the only “Christ” there is, and He is the Jesus in whom the church rejoices. (Gibbs, 75)

Besides being the Christ, Jesus is also called “the Son of David,” and so He comes to fulfill the promises made to David. Jesus is not a military leader like David was, but He is the fulfillment of God’s promise to David that his offspring would have a lasting house and kingdom. Gibbs sums up this role:

Matthew proclaims Jesus as Son of David, and that more extensively than the other canonical Gospels. . . . Even though His own did not rightly acknowledge Him, Jesus the Christ is the true Son of David and King of the Jews.

. . . Jesus the Christ is the one who has come in fulfillment of the promises to a particular people, promises that were given in a particular set of writings. Matthew proclaims Jesus as the one who comes in response to God’s promises to Israel. (Gibbs, 76)

Finally, the last of the three titles by which Matthew refers to Jesus is “the Son of Abraham.” This title seems to be focused on the people of Israel, but it also brings the promise that the Gentiles will be blessed through the Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Gibbs shows how this Son of Abraham has come to bless the entire world:

In emphatic and repeated ways in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is the Messiah of *Israel*; He is the royal Son of *David*. However, already in God’s first choosing of Abraham, there was the promise of blessing for “all the nations,” as Matthew affirms (in 24:9, 14; 25:32; 28:19).

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Thus in this early and sole New Testament mention of Jesus as “Son of Abraham,” Matthew hints at that mission to the Gentiles, even as he makes his transition to the ordered genealogical summary of the history of the people of God. (Gibbs, 77)

Why would Matthew begin his Gospel with a long genealogy? Modern readers might want to race through it. However, it is a treasure of biblical history and the intentional work of God to prepare for the birth of His Son. Gibbs points out how God’s determined plan to save the world unfolds with the three sets of fourteen generations:

The genealogy in 1:2–17 proclaims that the history of God’s people Israel has moved toward a goal. It has been a checkered history, marked sometimes by faithfulness to God, but more often by faithlessness. Yet the events were guided and ordered: “fourteen . . . fourteen . . . fourteen.” God, not the mere human characters, has directed the affairs of Israel toward their climax. . . . There is a unity to the Testaments, a unity that consists in the Man Jesus who is called Christ. All that *preceded* Jesus finds its meaning in him. (Gibbs, 82)

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 1

Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to His birth. What is the importance of Jesus being known as the Christ, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham?

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Matthew notes David and Abraham in particular. As Abraham had received the covenant promises of God, so David received the promise of God that his line would not end. David had planned to build a house for God, but God told him that He would build a house for David (see 2 Samuel 7:4–12). The One who was finally born would be the ultimate King, reigning forever. God said of this coming Savior and King, “I will be to Him a father, and He shall be to Me a son” (2 Samuel 7:14).

READING 2: MATTHEW 1:18-25
THE BIRTH OF JESUS

KEY INSIGHTS FOR READING 2

Following the genealogy, Matthew gives a brief account of the birth of Jesus. He demonstrates the significance of Jesus’ coming and the contrast between God’s plan and our human understanding. Gibbs gives three key points to the birth narrative in chapter 1:

First, the text’s structure contrasts the ways that human beings think and behave with the unexpected way in which God puts His plan to save into action. . . . Second, the unit highlights the naming of the Child: He is “Immanuel” (1:23), but receiving even more emphasis is “Jesus” (1:21, 25), the proper name that God Himself (through His angel) assigns to the Child miraculously conceived in the Virgin Mary. Third, by means of the first explicit Old Testament citation (Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23), Matthew invites his readers/hearers to reflect on the relationship between God’s ways of judgment and salvation in Israel’s history and those ways that have now come to fulfillment in Jesus the Christ, Immanuel, “God is with us” (1:23). (Gibbs, 104)

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 2

Through a dream, Joseph learns that Mary’s Child will be called Jesus, the Savior of the world (see 1:20–21). Of all the titles that Jesus could deservedly have, why is this the most appropriate name that reflects His mission?

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Practical Considerations

KEY QUESTION 1

Matthew includes five women in the genealogy. How do these women summarize important actions and aspects of the Old Testament while also speaking to readers today?

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Gibbs discusses these five women and their role in understanding Jesus' coming:

The four women are a diverse group. Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess surely were Gentiles, though it is not certain whether Tamar and Bathsheba were. Some acted righteously, though all surely were sinners. . . . The emphasis does not fall on the women's resourcefulness or initiative, but on the surprising grace of God.

Matthew includes these five women to emphasize that God is in control, and He has a purpose that He accomplishes in amazing ways. (Gibbs, 88–89)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION QUESTION 1

Gibbs describes the variety among the four women in the genealogy and also Mary, the fifth woman. With widely different backgrounds, how do they show the intentional plan of God to demonstrate grace to them and, thereby, to us all?

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KEY QUESTION 2

Jesus comes to save the world, born among us as Immanuel, God with us. Why is it important that God saves the world not from a distance but through the incarnation of Jesus and His decades of life among us?

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Gibbs notes that the title “Immanuel” locates Jesus not only as the God with us but as the God come to save us by His presence. He further describes the significance of Jesus being a Savior who is among us:

Latent here in this early unit in Matthew’s Gospel is the truth that the Nicene Creed faithfully confesses about Jesus of Nazareth: He is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.”

Yet 1:18–25 does not give primary place and prominence to the name “Immanuel,” as important as that Old Testament citation is for understanding the significance of Mary’s Child. Rather, after God has intervened and revealed the true origin and purpose of the Child, the text returns to the name “Jesus.” God’s presence with His people cannot be known apart from this Jesus whom the narrative ultimately will proclaim as the Crucified and Risen One. (Gibbs, 114)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION QUESTION 2

Joseph receives the wonderful message that Mary’s Child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and, furthermore, that this Child will be the Savior of the world. How is the news of this coming Child at first the most heartbreaking news for Joseph but then the very best news the world has ever heard?

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Final Thoughts

Matthew begins the Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, showing the completion of God's preparations to send the world its promised Savior. The three titles of Jesus are underscored in the three sets of fourteen generations in His genealogy. In a world of countless generations, there is certainty in Jesus coming at the fulfillment of these generations. Moreover, Jesus comes as the Christ, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. He is the fulfillment of Israel's history and hope, but He also brings salvation to the world. Gibbs describes this last title given to Jesus, Son of Abraham, as a sign of His saving the whole world:

Third and most importantly, however, we see here already the first of a number of intriguing indications in Matthew's Gospel that this Jesus, who summarizes *Israel's* history and who fulfills *Israel's* Scriptures and who embodies *Israel's* hope for end-time deliverance through One who is "Christ" and royal "Son of David," has also come *for the salvation of the Gentiles*. God's dealings with Abraham began with the promise of Genesis 12:1–3 and included this declaration: "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Gibbs, 77)

A Deeper Look

For further study, there are two interesting and important issues that come with the start of the book of Matthew. Did Matthew view his Gospel as Scripture and as a bridge, therefore, from the Old Testament to the beginning of the Gospel records of Jesus? And what are his key themes? Gibbs's commentary notes the following themes: the reign of heaven/God in Jesus and fulfillment and mission. For further readings, see the sections on pages 8–12 and pages 47–58 in the commentary.

Closing Prayer



LEADER NOTES

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?

For decades, the Concordia Commentary series has been a blessing to pastors, church workers, and readers around the world. Drawing from great theologians and experts in biblical languages and Lutheran tradition, the many volumes of this series have helped illuminate God's Word to countless Christians. The Concordia Commentaries are extensive in length and offer great depth of study.

This Bible study series pulls excerpts and ideas from the Concordia Commentaries to bring these treasures to readers in an individual or group Bible study setting. Consider these Bible studies to be guided tours of the books of the Bible by experts. Though not exhaustive, this study will help learners better understand key themes and insights that only commentary authors can give. In creating this series, some editorial decisions are factored in.

Within the different sessions, key passages from the Concordia Commentaries have been curated to help the learner gain insight into the biblical text. Thus, not every chapter nor verse covered in the commentary is covered in this series, simply for the sake of length and pacing for each lesson. By collecting and modifying key reflections from the commentary text, this study gives a straightforward taste of the rich treasure of the commentaries. That said, this Bible study series is not comprehensive, and learners may raise questions not covered in these study materials.

Additionally, each lesson has been arranged in a threefold manner to engage learners. After an introductory question, the study delves into a section on historical considerations. This provides a critical, general background on the text studied in each lesson. You can read this section with your participants to help set up the text. In the second section, the study digs into theological considerations. This includes two to five main pericopes to be studied in the lesson, with key insights and a discussion question at the end of each reading to facilitate deeper reflection within your group. The third section focuses

on practical considerations, which show us how the text applies to our daily lives. The discussion questions are designed to break up the reading of the text and bring out key points in the study materials.

The Answer Key provides prompts for you as a facilitator when guiding discussions. The questions in this study are designed to be broad and open-ended, meaning that there is generally not one prescribed answer for each question. The prompts provided are there to give you information and context for discussion, not to be the only “right” answers. Use these materials as you see best for your context. Here is a suggested pattern for conducting a lesson with your group:

1. Welcome learners. Ask learners if any of them had questions from the previous week.
2. Open with prayer, and the suggested hymn can be read or sung. Then, read through Introducing the Lesson together, including the Opening Question(s). Give your learners time to consider the question(s) on their own or in groups to get them primed for the text to come.
3. Read through Historical Considerations together, perhaps asking volunteers to read paragraphs one at a time as others follow along.
4. For the Theological Considerations section, read each Bible reading together. How you decide to utilize the Key Insights is up to you. You may want to pause at appropriate times to read through the insights, you may want to read them as a group after the reading, or you may want to give learners time to digest the Key Insights silently on their own after you read the biblical text. The Reflection Question for each reading section is designed to draw the learners back into the text, and the prompts in the Answer Key may be beneficial for you as a leader in drawing out new or different understandings as you facilitate discussion.
5. The Practical Considerations section returns to the key questions of the study at the end of each lesson, with some commentary and reflection questions.
6. The Final Thoughts section wraps up the theme of the main text.
7. A Deeper Look provides suggestions for further reading from the commentary.
8. If you have additional time, the Bonus Activities at the end of this guide can be used to generate discussions and apply the material from each session to our lives.
9. Finally, you can lead your group in a Closing Prayer.



ANSWER KEY FOR SESSION 1

WHO IS JESUS?

Introducing the Lesson

Opening Questions: Who do you know who is always on time, who you never have to wait for or worry whether they're coming? How does the arrival of Jesus come at exactly the right time, being born from exactly the right people?

Let participants tell a story or two of someone who is always on time so that no matter the weather, the traffic, or the time of day or night, he or she is always there—even early! Then turn the discussion to the timeliness of Jesus' arrival as seen in the Matthew 1 genealogy. Jesus comes as the fourteenth generation of the third set of fourteen generations. Contrast the eager and even restless waiting of the world with the plan of God that would be fulfilled in His time.

Theological Considerations

READING 1: MATTHEW 1:1–17
JESUS' THREE TITLES

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 1

Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to His birth. What is the importance of Jesus being known as the Christ, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham?

Matthew is writing primarily to the people of Israel, so the genealogy that begins with Abraham is the distinctive starting point for all people of Israel. Abraham receives the covenant promises of God, most especially the promise that by his descendant all the world would be blessed (see Genesis 12:3 and Galatians 3:16, 29). The birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah when he was one hundred and she was ninety years old prepares us for the even greater miracle of the virgin birth of Jesus. Abraham is also the model of faith as Paul notes in Romans 4:3: “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as

righteousness.” Abraham does not *earn* his place in the Savior’s genealogy, but he *receives* the mercy of the Savior, who is descended from him.

READING 2: MATTHEW 1:18–25

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 2

Through a dream, Joseph learns that Mary’s Child will be called Jesus, the Savior of the world (see 1:20–21). Of all the titles that Jesus could deservedly have, why is this the most appropriate name that reflects His mission?

We can easily supply so many titles that could describe Jesus. Isaiah 9:6 speaks of Him as the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” All these titles point especially to His divine nature. If His name reflected only His power as Creator and Judge, what fear we would have on His birth! But Jesus has come to be the Savior of the world. It will require both His divine and human natures to bring us salvation. By His divine nature, He is able to pay the ransom for the entire world, even while, according to His human nature, we see Him as Servant of all.

Practical Considerations

KEY QUESTION 1

Matthew includes five women in the genealogy. How do these women summarize important actions and aspects of the Old Testament while also speaking to readers today?

The Savior has come for all people, and He has come from a line of people who are models of both faith and God’s mercy. The five women in the genealogy are widely different. Rahab and Ruth were Gentiles, while Tamar and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, were likely Israelites, as was Mary. Overall, the five women in the genealogy show the intentional plan of God to work through both Jews and Gentiles to bring about Jesus’ birth. God works in surprising ways, whether it is through rescuing Rahab from the destruction of Jericho or leading Ruth to the people of Israel, where she might marry Boaz. In a long journey, God shapes the lives of these women that they might both be saved and be a key part of the Savior’s line.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION QUESTION 1

Gibbs describes the variety among the four women in the genealogy and also Mary, the fifth woman. With widely different backgrounds, how do they show the intentional plan of God to demonstrate grace to them and, thereby, to us all?

Rahab and Esther were Gentiles whom God brought into His people, Israel, by faith. They represent all Gentiles from every people group on earth. Beyond their ethnic backgrounds, these women also came from a wide range of lifestyles from faithful to immoral—from faithful Mary to Tamar, a woman who became pregnant by her father-in-law (Judah); Rahab, a prostitute; and Bathsheba, an adulteress. Yet, despite their sins, God had mercy on them and saved them by bringing them to repentance and faith. That gives us assurance that He also forgives us for Jesus' sake—no matter our background or our sinful lifestyles.

KEY QUESTION 2

Jesus comes to save the world, born among us as Immanuel, the God with us. Why is it important that God saves the world not from a distance but through the incarnation of Jesus and His decades of life among us?

God could have simply commanded the salvation of the world, but He chose to do so by the fulfillment of the Law through Jesus' life. As Jesus says in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." So He bears the Law to redeem us, as Galatians 4:4–5 notes: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." He lives among us with mercy while placing onto Himself the burdens that would crush us.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION QUESTION 2

Joseph receives the wonderful message that Mary's Child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and, furthermore, that this Child will be the Savior of the world. How was the news of this coming Child at first the most heartbreaking news for Joseph but then the very best news the world has ever heard?

Joseph must have been devastated to hear that Mary was expecting a child. All his plans and hopes were destroyed. But what a change came when the angel assured him that this Child was not the end of his hope.

