

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
on
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: **“The Gospel of Matthew”** (Epiphany 2019)

This Week's Theme and Scriptural Focus: **“The Beginning.”**

This Week's Mark(s) of Discipleship: **Peace** (I am free from anxiety because I am reconciled in Christ, find my identity in Christ, and seek healthy relationships with others).

Day #1--Monday, January 7th. Read: Matthew 1.1-6. Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

The *Gospel* of Matthew is just that—a “gospel.” As a gospel, Matthew is concerned with describing the life, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who has redeemed and reconciled this world; this is “good news” for all! Good news is the English translation of “Gospel,” from the Greek: εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*), literally, “A good report.” As Eugene Boring notes, “The gospel was a message before it became a book. The term is used by the early church for the good news of the saving act of God in Jesus Christ.”¹

While the book of Matthew is “anonymous,” meaning that in the text itself, no authorship is noted (which is true for all four Gospels), tradition tells us that Jesus' apostle/disciple, Matthew Levi, the former tax-collector, was the author of this Gospel, written roughly in 70 A.D. or later. According to Jeffrey Gibbs, the Gospel of Matthew has a three-fold focus; Matthew is:

...Addressing a broad Christian audience of Jewish and Gentile worshipping communities in Syria and Palestine...with special emphases that (1) Jesus, Son of David and true King of Israel, fulfilled God's dealings with His people in the OT...that (2)...Jesus is the mighty Judge who will return on the last day...and that (3) until the age's consummation, the disciples of the Son of God are to occupy themselves with extending Jesus' own mission to save both Jew and Gentile.²

Already at the beginning we see a theme in Matthew: the fulfillment of Scripture; specifically, the fulfillment of the promised Messiah! As Craig Blomberg notes:

Key Matthean titles for Jesus...appear here in the opening verse. “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Meshiach* (Messiah), meaning *Anointed One*...“Son of David” points to the Messiah's necessary lineage and royal role...“Son of Abraham” traces Jesus' lineage back to the founding father of the nation of Israel, thus ensuring his Jewish pedigree from the earliest stage of his people's history...³

Consider/Reflect: Pray that God will deepen your love for Him through this study of Matthew, and equip you to serve Him in your life.

Day #2--Tuesday, January 8th. Read: Matthew 1.7-17. Examine: The Text and its Relationship to other Passages.

Matthew chapters 1-2 are typically referred to as Matthew's “Christmas story,” though the actual birth narrative is absent. The beginning of chapter 1 is the genealogy. Matthew begins with a genealogy to both illustrate

¹ M. Eugene Boring. *The New Interpreter's Bible: The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

² Jeffrey A. Gibbs. *Matthew* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

³ C. Blomberg. *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

God's movement through history, as well as the fulfillment of His promises. In some cultures, the use of a genealogy is evidence for a trustworthy history.

The first main portion of the account of Jesus' origin presents his genealogy in order to validate Matthew's claims that Jesus is the son of Abraham and of David. The genealogy divides into three sections, as v. 17 makes clear. The times of Abraham, of David, and of the Babylonian exile mark the beginnings of these three periods. The genealogy culminates in the arrival of the Christ (vv. 16–17). Thus all three titles of v. 1 reappear as central elements in the genealogy. The Babylonian exile appears centrally as well, perhaps because Jesus is seen as the climax of the restoration of the nation of Israel from exile.⁴

Additionally, there is a literary and theological purpose for Matthew's genealogy. Again, Blomberg:

David... is the central figure throughout the genealogy. When one adds up the numerical values of the Hebrew consonants in his name (*DVD*), one arrives at the number fourteen (4+6+4). This *gematria*, as ancient Hebrew numerical equivalents to words are termed, probably accounts for the centrality of the number fourteen in Matthew's genealogy. Each of the three sections contains fourteen generations (v. 17), and David's name itself is the fourteenth entry... When one compares the genealogy with Luke's account (Luke 3:23–37) and with various Old Testament narratives, it is clear that Matthew has omitted several names to achieve this literary symmetry... Two major proposals concern the divergence of names in the two genealogies: (1) Luke presents Mary's genealogy, while Matthew relates Joseph's; (2) Luke has Jesus' actual human ancestry through Joseph, while Matthew gives his legal ancestry by which he was the legitimate successor to the throne of David. Knowing which of these solutions is more likely probably is impossible unless new evidence turns up.⁵

Consider/Reflect: “In the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Matthew makes no effort to hide sinners and scandals. Instead, he highlights them. Jesus' ancestors include prostitutes, adulterers, violent men, and other sinners of all descriptions. Though this might surprise us, the truth is that there were no people other than sinners to make up His genealogy. Jesus' ancestors needed a Savior just as much as we do. If God, in His grace, can use such flawed and sinful people, how much more can He bless and use sinners who witness the Messiah's sinless sacrifice and believe in Him today! [Pray]: Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for including me, a sinner, among those whom You came to save. Amen.”⁶

□ **Day #3--Wednesday, January 9th. Read: Matthew 1.18-25. Explore:** The background to this text(s).

It is very clear that the birth stories of Jesus, found in Luke and Matthew only, are very different. Combined, these two Gospels provide the story of Jesus' birth that we celebrate every year! What is interesting to note is that in Matthew, the story is told from the point of view of Joseph, and in Luke, from Mary's perspective. The drama and potential scandal; of Mary's pregnancy is resolved as Joseph takes Jesus as his legal son. Again, we witness the sovereignty of God. As Messiah, Jesus must be from the line of David, which Joseph is, but Joseph is not Jesus' true Father. “Only if Joseph formally ‘adopted’ him could he too be “son of David.” It took a divine revelation to persuade Joseph to do so, by accepting the pregnant Mary as his wife and then giving the child a name.”⁷

...in a dream (cf. Matt. 2:13, 19, 22), an angel told Joseph that Mary's condition was not caused by a man, but through the Holy Spirit (1:20; cf. v. 18). The Child Mary carried in her womb was a unique Child, for He would be a Son whom Joseph should name Jesus for He would save His people from their sins. These words must have brought to Joseph's mind the promises of God to provide salvation

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

⁷ D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, and G.J. Wenham (Eds.). *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

through the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–37). The...angel also told Joseph that this was in keeping with God's eternal plan, for the Prophet Isaiah had declared 700 years before that the virgin will be with Child (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14)...Mary's miraculous conception fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, and her Son would truly be Immanuel ... God with us. In light of this declaration Joseph was not to be afraid to take Mary into his home (Matt. 1:20). There would be misunderstanding in the community and much gossip at the well, but Joseph knew the true story of Mary's pregnancy and God's will for his life.⁸

Consider/Reflect: “Joseph serves as a model for believers. Before he knew the reason for Mary's pregnancy, he wanted to treat her justly but mercifully. However, when God's angel reveals the unique miracle of a virginal conception, Joseph believes, and he fulfills his responsibilities by marrying his betrothed and raising Jesus. Some people today struggle to believe the virgin birth, but it takes no more faith for us to believe than it did for Joseph. In fact, we have the evidence of Joseph's testimony to help us. He saw and believed that God can do what He promises. Likewise, the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts to believe that God can do anything good and that Jesus is truly both God and man. [Pray]: O Holy Spirit, strengthen my faith, and fill me with joy as I reflect on the miracle of Christ's birth. Amen.”⁹

□ **Day #4—Thursday, January 10th. Read: Matthew 2.1-6. Explore:** The Background to this Text.

While we tend to conflate the story of the “Wise Men” with the birth of Jesus, the shepherds and angels, actually, the visit of the Magi came later. How long after Jesus was born we do not know. However, tradition, and some details in the text, can give us a clue. According to Craig Blomberg:

The birth itself is probably to be dated around the year 6 B.C. A comparison of vv. 7 and 16 suggests that perhaps one to two years have elapsed since Jesus' birth. Verse 11 describes Joseph and Mary now living in a house, so they obviously have left their temporary lodgings described in Luke 2:7. From other historical materials we know that Herod died in 4 B.C...Herod the Great was a half-Jew, half-Idumean, who, through accommodation to the Romans, ascended to power as client-ruler of Israel in 37 B.C.¹⁰

The Magi were likely Persian priest-astrologers who could interpret the stars, particularly the significance of the star that proclaimed the birth of the Messiah. The word “Magi” comes from the Greek word “*mágos*” (it's plural is “*mágoi*”) which is translated “magi” or “wise men.” Again, one of Matthew's purposes in composing his gospel was to show how Jesus fulfilled all of the messianic prophecies given in the Old Testament. Here, in the very beginning of his gospel, Matthew records that these Magi were guided by a star in the sky. Balaam prophesied about the coming Messiah who would be marked by a star: “I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob and a staff shall rise from Israel...” (Numbers 24:17). Consequently, the Magi desire to see the Messiah-King and honor Him.

As we discussed on Sunday, the story of the Magi is also associated with the season of Epiphany. The term “epiphany” comes from a Greek word which means “appearance” or “manifestation.” In early church history, the feast of Epiphany originally celebrated the birth of Jesus. However, as the church established December 25th as the day to celebrate Jesus' birth, Epiphany was designated as the event that *manifested* Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. During Epiphany, our focus turns toward the purpose and reason for the birth of this child: He has come to be the Savior for all people!

Consider/Reflect: “In the Western church...the day of Epiphany...is always a celebration of the coming of the wise men who brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus...Even as our Christmas spirituality was shaped

⁸ J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck Eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

⁹ *Lutheran Study Bible*.

¹⁰ Blomberg. *Matthew*.

by the dominant theme of the incarnation, so now our Epiphany spirituality will be shaped by the overriding theme of Christ's manifestation as Savior of the world."¹¹

□ **Day #5-Friday, January 11th. Read: Matthew 2.7-18. Embrace:** God and His guiding you through His Word.

The star guides them to Bethlehem. "This is the first time the star is actually said to move. The text leaves open the question of whether or not it had so moved previously. If it had not, this could explain why the Magi had managed to get only as far as Jerusalem. They may have seen the star above Israel and assumed that its ruler would be born in the capital."¹² The Magi find the holy family and bow in worship to this infant-King! Gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh are given. Why these gifts?

The gifts used to honor the new king were typically associated with royalty. Because Matthew has not yet introduced the theme of Jesus' death, it is not likely that he is implying it here, even though myrrh was a spice often used in embalming. Rather, all three gifts honor the Christ child as King. Gold, then as now, was a precious metal prized for its beauty and value, an appropriate regal gift. Frankincense and myrrh were fragrant spices and perfumes equally appropriate for such adoration and worship. Similar visits of Magi to royalty are described in other Greco-Roman literature of the time (Dio Cassius *Roman History* 63.7; Suetonius, *Nero* 13), but more significant here is the Jewish background.¹³

The Magi are told not to return to Herod. When the Magi do not return, Herod flies into a murderous rage. Joseph is told in a dream to flee to Egypt. "Egypt afforded a natural haven for first-century Jews. A large Jewish community had lived there for several centuries, and even from Old Testament times Egypt had often provided a refuge when danger threatened Israel"¹⁴ Herod now orders the killing of boys two years and younger (another sign that the Magi's visit was after Jesus' birth—perhaps up to two years after).

It is often observed that there are no other historical documents substantiating Herod's "massacre of the innocents." But given the small size of Bethlehem and the rural nature of the surrounding region, there may have been as few as twenty children involved, and the killings would have represented a relatively minor incident in Herod's career, worthy of little notice by ancient historians who concentrated on great political and military exploits.¹⁵

Consider/Reflect: "God uses a star, Scripture, and a dream to guide the Magi on their way to and from Bethlehem. They are the first of many Gentiles to worship Jesus. Today, through His Word, the Father guides people of all nations to Christ. Jesus is the "star" the Father provided for us so that we can see our Savior. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts through the Gospel, and like the Magi, we joyfully offer our gifts of thanksgiving to Jesus."¹⁶

□ **Day #6--Saturday, January 12th. Read: Matthew 2.19-23. Embrace:** God and His guiding you through His Word.

Chapter 2 ends with the holy family's return to Nazareth, "where he is established in the village which was to give him his title, Jesus of Nazareth...Matthew's primary concern was to show that these changes of location were not haphazard but were directed by God and had been foreshadowed in Scripture."¹⁷ Blomberg adds:

Now another potential threat appears on the horizon. After Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided into four parts or tetrarchies. His oldest son Archelaus ruled in Judea and was notorious for his

¹¹ Robert E. Webber. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004).

¹² Blomberg. *Matthew*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Lutheran Study Bible*.

¹⁷ Walvoord, et al, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

cruelty...Antipas, a second son of Herod, who ruled in Galilee to the north, was not perceived as such a threat. So Joseph, Mary, and Jesus go to Galilee rather than Judea to settle in the city in which they once lived. Many commentators find a contradiction in these verses with Luke because Matthew seems to know nothing of Mary's and Joseph's original residence in Nazareth. But Matthew narrates only that which is relevant to his fulfillment quotations. He certainly says nothing that would exclude a previous residence in Galilee. Probably Mary and Joseph had intended to resettle in Bethlehem in their ancestral homeland and now have to change their plans and go north once again.¹⁸

Consider/Reflect: “God’s revelation leads Joseph to take Mary as his wife. He later flees to Egypt and finally settles permanently in Nazareth with God’s guidance. These events may have seemed confusing to Joseph, but God had a plan. All of the Lord’s leading was to fulfill OT prophecies. We do not always know where God is leading us, but we can be sure that He will be with us and that His plans are for our good. [Pray]: Loving Father, help me to pray with Jesus, “Your will be done,” and follow where You lead. Amen.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*.

¹⁹ *Lutheran Study Bible*.