 **THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

 *Lesson 1 – Study Questions*

 *Matthew 1-2*

**Review**: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

INTRODUCTION: With this lesson we begin our study of The Gospel According to Matthew. Since it was positioned first of the four gospels in the New Testament it was traditionally thought of as the first to be written, an opinion no longer held by most scholars. The question of authorship of this Gospel has been greatly debated by scholars. While traditionally the author of this Gospel was identified as Matthew, the tax collector, who was called by Jesus (Matt 9:9), the author does not identify himself and many scholars now agree that he was not the author of the Gospel.

Most consider that the Gospel of Matthew is based in large part on the Gospel According to Mark as well as an unknown source, often referred to as “Q.” Matthew is estimated to have been written somewhere between 70-90 A.D., our Commentary suggests 85 A.D., and was directed primarily to Jewish Christians. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called synoptic, because they are similar in content. John, of course, is the fourth gospel writer. Together, they are known as the four evangelists.

In the early Church each evangelist was traditionally represented by a winged symbol. Matthew’s symbol is a divine man, sometimes an angel, because he begins his Gospel with Christ’s genealogy and focuses on the humanity of Christ. Mark is represented by a lion, a symbol of courageous monarchy, and the Gospel opens with John the Baptist roaring like a lion in the wilderness. Luke is represented by an ox or calf, an animal of sacrifice, indicating Christ’s priestly and sacrificial role. An eagle is the companion of John because in his Gospel, John’s words and visions are said to “soar” above earthly events to contemplate the divinity of Christ.

*Jesus, in the Gospel According to Matthew, you are confirmed as the longed-for Messiah who fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and as the new Lawgiver who founded the Church of the New Covenant. Help us to follow your teachings in our lives on earth so that we may live forever with you in heaven. Bless each of The Cornerstone members as we undertake this study. Amen*

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 1:1-17

NOTE: Today’s lesson begins with what is called “The Infancy Narrative,” a story familiar to us, and yet with prayerful reading, may offer some surprises and new perspectives. The first 17 verses are a long list of names, in essence, Jesus’ family tree. Bishop Robert Barron speaks to this, noting the “outsiders” in Jesus’ genealogy:

Jacob, who wrestled with God; Rahab, who was a prostitute; Ruth, who was a Moabite who followed her mother-in law back to Bethlehem, and King David, who was also a murderer and adulterer. Bishop Barron said, “the Word became Flesh, just like our own, and lived among us; a message that indeed, God accepts and loves us all. The mighty Lord becomes the tiny Prince of Peace in the mystery of the Incarnation.” *Bishop Robert Barron, Sunday Sermons*

1. Matthew’s long list of genealogical names is not necessarily historical but a way to situate Jesus in relation to the memorable characters, both saints and sinners, in Israel’s history. What are a few of the names from this genealogical list with which you are most familiar?

Share what you recall about them.

2. The detailed genealogy of Jesus, emphasizing his descent from Old Testament biblical patriarchs such as Abraham and David, is intended to tell who he is by recounting who his people are. How has your own family history shaped the person you are today?

NOTE: Among the names Matthew includes are four women. Thus, the story of Jesus’ genealogy includes non-Jews as well as Jews and women as well as men. The stories of those women are briefly noted within the Commentary. For more on them, see Genesis 38; Joshua 2:1-16; 6:22-25; Ruth 1:1-22; 4:13-17; and 2 Samuel 11.

3. Luke’s Gospel (Luke 1:26-38) also begins with an infancy narrative but from a different perspective. While Matthew’s version details his lineage through Joseph, Luke tells in detail the joyful news of the Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity of our Lord. How does having two different perspectives enhance your understanding of the Incarnation of Jesus?

4. Record and reflect on verse 16 which is the final link in the genealogy of Jesus and establishes the newly created Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

THINK: The early church father *Origen* said in regard to scriptural differences in the synoptics, “But let these four agree with one another concerning certain basic things revealed to them by the Spirit and let them disagree a little concerning other things.”

5. CONNECTION: The story of Jesus’ conception, so familiar and yet so mysterious, is a reminder that God is close to us. He came to us as a child, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Imagine that we could have held this tiny baby, who is God, in our hands. Jesus is both a continuation of God’s love for his people, but also a change. In what way does your belief in Jesus’ human birth bring you closer to God in faith?

Read and record Isaiah 7:14 and write a prayer of thanksgiving for the hope found in the knowledge of Christ as a child, born to a mother just like each of us.

DAY TWO

Read Matthew 1:18-24

6. In today’s lesson Matthew begins to describe how the birth of Jesus Christ came about, stating that “his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit” (verse 18). Read and record one of these other examples of the divine spirit at work in Jesus’ conception:

Matthew 1:20

Luke 1:35

John 1:14

7. Hidden within those simple words “found with child through the Holy Spirit” is the faith and obedience of the young woman who humbly accepted God’s will. Read Luke 1:38 and consider how “walking with Mary” may help you to be more humble and more trusting in God.

8. In this infancy narrative we read of the angel appearing to Joseph in a dream to reassure him that the child is of God and will save his people from their sins. The angel pronounces the name of the child: *Jesus*. See the Commentary for the meaning of this name (page 16).

9. Matthew’s Gospel links Jesus to the prophecy of Isaiah, providing additional continuity between the Old Testament and Jesus, as the fulfillment of Scripture (a key theme for Matthew’s Gospel). Record and reflect on verse 23.

10. CONNECTION: Because this story is very familiar to us, we can infer what the last few sentences in chapter 1 suggest to us about Joseph’s character and his importance in Jesus’ life. List the fatherly qualities you would attribute to Joseph from your reading and from your knowledge of this important saint and relate those characteristics to how you would imagine Joseph as a parent to Jesus.

Read Deuteronomy 11:1. As you begin your prayer today, remember the men in your life who have represented to you the qualities of St. Joseph.

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 2:1-12

11. As chapter 2 begins, Bethlehem in Judea, a small town 5-7 miles south of Jerusalem, is identified as the birthplace of Jesus. Bethlehem is also known as the place where David was anointed king (1 Samuel 16:1-13). In Hebrew, Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Share your thoughts on the significance of Jesus, “the Bread of Life,” coming from a small town named for bread.

12. According to Matthew, in the days of King Herod of Judea, the first visitors to the baby Jesus were referred to as “magi.” Refer to the Commentary, page 17, and briefly describe who these men most likely would have been.

13. The star leading the magi would appear to fulfill Old and New Testament prophetic statements. God used this phenomenon to announce the birth of his Son. Record a related phrase or two from one or more of the following:

Numbers 24:17

Isaiah 60:1-6

Luke 1:78-79 (from the Canticle of Zechariah)

NOTE: The star that is able to lead every man and woman to Jesus is the Word of God…the light that guides our journey, nourishes our faith and regenerates it. *Pope Francis, The Gospel of Matthew*

14. Is there a Christmas tradition connected to the Nativity that is particularly meaningful to you?

NOTE: St. Francis of Assisi over 800 years ago, is credited with the nativity scene for Christmas

with which we are all familiar.

15. CONNECTION: Seeing the Christ child, the magi had an “epiphany” that the king they sought was the Son of God. An epiphany “is something that not only gets our attention but also reveals something of enormous significance. For the wise men it was first the star, but the real epiphany was the baby King. We should be attentive in a similar way to these moments of breakthrough that speak to us of God—and we should respond.” *Bishop Robert Barron* Can you share an epiphany that you have had recently, perhaps even through your study and prayer at The Cornerstone?

Reread Matthew 2:12 in which the magi are warned of Herod’s intentions and write a prayer today asking that you may always listen to find the right way home.

DAY FOUR

Read Matthew 2:13-15

16. Each of the Gospels speaks of those who attempted to destroy Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. Matthew however describes this even earlier, just after the departure of the magi. In what manner did the angel of the Lord warn Joseph and what did he say (verse 13)?

17. Dreams are prominent in these first two chapters of Matthew. Share some of the ways in which you hear God’s voice.

18. Joseph obeys the angel’s command and takes Jesus and his mother to Egypt, a traditional place of refuge for Israelites. Read and record one of the following:

Genesis 47:27

1 Kings 11:40

Jeremiah 26:21

19. Jesus, Mary and Joseph stayed in Egypt until Herod died so “that which the prophet said might be fulfilled” (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15). What important Old Testament event is being described in Hosea and to whom is Matthew comparing Jesus?

20. CONNECTION: Matthew is the only Gospel in which the flight into Egypt is recorded. The world is full of people who have had to leave their homes, not just refugees or immigrants, but the elderly, students, military, and others. What are some of the problems that the Holy Family might have faced? How might their flight parallel experiences you have had in moving from one place to another?

Read and reflect on Psalm 139:1-6. Write a prayer today thankful for God’s constant presence in your life.

DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 2:16-23

21. The episode of the massacre of the Innocents provides another parallel between Jesus and Moses. Refer to Exodus 1:15-22 and briefly compare these two events.

22. Herod’s slaughter of the boys in Bethlehem fulfills a prophecy in Jeremiah in which Rachel, Jacob’s wife, (from her tomb near Bethlehem) wept for her children in exile (Jeremiah 31:15). Read Jeremiah 31:16 and briefly note why her weeping would turn to joy, new hope and new life.

NOTE: The Feast of the Holy Innocents is celebrated on December 28. Pope Francis stated (2016) “Christmas is…accompanied, whether we like it or not, by tears. The Evangelists did not disguise reality to make it more credible or attractive; on the contrary, they relate the birth of the Son of God as an event fraught with tragedy and grief. Quoting the prophet Jeremiah, Matthew presents it in the bluntest of terms. It is the sobbing of mothers bewailing the death of their children in the face of Herod’s tyranny and unbridled thirst for power.” *EWTN*

23. Just as Moses received a divine command to return home (Exodus 4:19), so does Joseph. Joseph receives his fourth dream in which an angel directs him to take his family to Galilee. Record and reflect on verse 23.

24. The Commentary points out that there is actually no scripture verse in the Old Testament that says, “He shall be called a Nazorean.” Rather, Matthew is alluding to the prophecy in Isaiah 11:1, which begins “But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse…” What does the Commentary, page 21, say that the final verse of the infancy narrative rounds out?

NOTE: Matthew’s infancy narrative contains 5 “fulfillment passages”; in other words, prophecies from the Old Testament that could be related to Jesus, firmly establishing him as the long-awaited savior, but also inferring a future meaning for readers then and now. They include the birth of Emmanuel, the coming of a shepherd from Bethlehem, God’s son being called up out of Egypt, Rachel’s lamentation for her children, and one who shall be called a Nazorean, and there are more throughout Matthew. *Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Infancy Narratives, Matthew*

Look for Matthew’s connections to the Old Testament throughout this study and consider how this affected the Jewish Christians then and us now.

25. CONNECTION: Whether we speak of Jeremiah’s description of Rachel and her children or the return from Egypt to a home in Nazareth, we can see “from death to new life” reassuring us of God’s great plan. How does this assurance help you prepare for or accept the changes in your life?

Record and reflect on John 11:25-26 and let Jesus’ words lead you into prayer.

FINAL QUESTION for the WEEK

Choose a specific verse or a concept from this week’s lesson and share how, with the Lord’s help, you might apply it to your life.

Read pages 5-10 (Introduction) and 11-21 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew by Barbara E. Reid, O.P.* The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) ©2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

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