

Matthew - Study 1

The Genealogy and Birth of Jesus

Key Passage

Matthew 1:1, 18, 21-23 (ESV) *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham... Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit... She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins... "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).*

Introduction

Matthew 1:1-2:23 is the opening act of the New Testament, and it is anything but a slow beginning. In fewer than fifty verses, Matthew establishes the legal lineage of Jesus, announces the miraculous nature of His conception, records the fulfilment of Isaiah's ancient prophecy, identifies the birthplace as Bethlehem of Judea in accordance with Micah 5:2, and narrates the flight of the holy family to Egypt and their return to Nazareth. Every sentence is loaded with Old Testament resonance, written by a Jewish tax-collector for a Jewish audience who knew their Scriptures and were waiting for their Messiah.

The governing question of these two chapters is the same question the whole Gospel will press upon the reader: Who is this Jesus? Matthew answers it from the very first verse with two royal titles — Son of David, Son of Abraham — and he continues to answer it through genealogy, angelic announcement, prophetic fulfilment, and the witness of foreign sages who travel great distances to worship One they recognise as King.

I. The Genealogy of Jesus Christ (1:1-17)

The Opening Declaration (v. 1)

Matthew 1:1 (ESV) *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*

The Greek phrase *biblos genéseos* (βίβλος γενέσεως) is a direct echo of the Septuagint text of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1, where the same phrase introduces the account of creation and the genealogy of Adam. Matthew is not writing a casual opening line. He is announcing a new beginning, a new genesis, as momentous as the first. The reader familiar with the Greek Old Testament would have felt the weight immediately.

Two titles are given to Jesus in this verse, and the order is significant. Son of David comes before Son of Abraham, even though Abraham is the earlier figure chronologically. This reversal is deliberate: Matthew's primary argument is Messianic kingship. Jesus is first the royal heir to David's throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4), and through David He is also the heir of the Abrahamic covenant promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17-18). Both covenants converge in this one person.

The Three Epochs and the Number Fourteen (vv. 2-17)

Matthew structures the genealogy into three periods of fourteen generations: Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian exile, and the exile to Christ. This is a mnemonic and theological device rooted in Hebrew gematria — the numerical value of the consonants in the name David (Dalet-Vav-Dalet, דוד) adds to fourteen. By presenting three groups of fourteen, Matthew is tracing the whole arc of Israelite history and arguing that every phase — patriarchal promise, monarchical glory, exile and waiting — has been converging toward this moment and this King.

It should be noted that Matthew omits several names that appear in the Old Testament genealogies (compare 1 Chronicles 3). Hebrew genealogical writing regularly permitted such omissions; the verb

“begot” (Greek: *egénnesen, ἐγέννησεν*) could span multiple generations. The purpose is theological argument, not a complete biological record.

The Five Women in the Line

Matthew’s inclusion of five women — Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba (referred to only as “the wife of Uriah”), and Mary — is striking in the context of Jewish genealogical convention. Each is introduced for a reason:

- Tamar (v. 3) — A Canaanite woman who was wronged by Judah’s sons, and who secured the covenant line through an unconventional act of faithfulness (Genesis 38). God overruled both sin and injustice.
- Rahab (v. 5) — A Gentile prostitute from Jericho who sheltered the Israelite spies, made a confession of faith in the God of Israel, and was woven permanently into His people (Joshua 2; 6:22-25; Hebrews 11:31).
- Ruth (v. 5) — A Moabite widow whose loyalty and love became a type of the Gentiles’ inclusion in God’s redemptive purposes. Her kinsman-redeemer Boaz is a shadow of Christ (Ruth 4:13-22).
- Bathsheba — “the wife of Uriah” (v. 6) — Matthew’s pointed retention of Uriah’s name is a deliberate reminder of David’s sin. God’s grace does not erase history; it redeems it.
- Mary (v. 16) — Grammatically distinguished from all the others. Every other entry reads “X begot Y”; but of Mary, Matthew writes: “of whom was born Jesus.” The passive voice and the feminine pronoun signal the virgin birth before the narrative even reaches it.

Cross-References: The Covenants Fulfilled in Christ

Abrahamic Covenant: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 22:17-18 — Davidic Covenant: 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4; Isaiah 11:1 — Blessing of the Nations: Galatians 3:16, 29

II. The Birth of Jesus Christ (1:18-25)

The Virgin Conception (v. 18)

Matthew 1:18 (ESV) *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew states the miracle plainly and without apology. Jewish betrothal (erusin, אֵרוּסִין) in the first century was a legally binding contract. To dissolve it required a formal certificate of divorce. To be found pregnant during this period was treated in law as equivalent to adultery (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). The social and legal exposure Mary faced was extreme.

The text is explicit: the pregnancy did not arise from a union between Mary and Joseph, nor from any other human father. The source is the Holy Spirit. Matthew records this as a straightforward historical fact. The reader is not invited to speculate about the mechanism; we are simply told what happened.

Joseph's Righteousness and Mercy (vv. 19-20)

Matthew 1:19 (ESV) *And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.*

Joseph is described with the Greek adjective dikáios (δίκαιος), righteous or just. Under the Law he had the right to make Mary's situation public, which would have carried severe consequences. Instead, he chose the most merciful option available within the legal framework: a quiet divorce. This reveals a man who took the Law seriously but was not weaponising it. His righteousness was shaped by compassion, not pride.

The angel's appearance to Joseph in a dream uses a mode of divine communication that runs throughout the Old Testament: to the

patriarchs Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph himself, and to the prophet Daniel. Matthew places Joseph in this tradition deliberately. He is a man to whom God speaks, and he is a man who obeys.

The Name and Mission of the Child (vv. 21-23)

Matthew 1:21 (ESV) *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*

The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעַ), which itself is a shortened form of Yehoshua (יְהוֹשׁוּעַ) — meaning the LORD saves or the LORD is salvation. The original Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land; this greater Joshua will lead His people through death and into eternal life. The angel does not merely assign the name but explains it, anchoring the mission in the meaning: He will save His people from their sins.

Note carefully what is not said. The angel does not say He will save His people from Roman occupation, from poverty, from illness, or from political oppression. The deepest problem of humanity, the one that generates every other problem, is not political but moral and spiritual: sin, and the death and condemnation it produces. This is the primary mission Matthew announces at the outset, and it governs the entire Gospel.

Matthew 1:22-23 (ESV) *All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14. The Hebrew word *almà* (עַלְמָה) in Isaiah’s original text means a young woman of marriageable age, with the strong cultural implication of virginity. The Septuagint translators rendered it with the Greek *parthenos* (παρθένος), which specifically denotes a virgin.

Matthew, writing in Greek, uses the same word and applies it to a concrete historical event: Mary's conception without a human father.

The title Immanuel — God with us — is one of the most staggering theological declarations in the chapter. Jesus is not merely a prophet whom God authorised, or a teacher whom God equipped. He is, in His very person, God present among humanity. This title anticipates what John will declare in the prologue of his Gospel: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, ESV). The name Jesus tells us His mission; the name Immanuel tells us His nature. Together they are the Gospel in miniature.

Joseph's Obedience (vv. 24-25)

Matthew 1:24-25 (ESV) *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

Joseph's obedience is immediate and complete. He does not delay, negotiate, or seek a second confirmation. He woke and did as the angel commanded. This is the mark of genuine faith — not the absence of difficulty or confusion, but the willingness to act on God's word even when the circumstances remain humanly bewildering.

The phrase knew her not until she had given birth carries legal and theological weight. Joseph's restraint was an act of submission to God's redemptive plan, protecting the integrity of the miraculous conception until after the birth. The word until does not require that the couple remained celibate thereafter — and the later references to Jesus's brothers and sisters in Matthew 12:46 and 13:55 indicate they did not.

The final act of this passage — Joseph calling the child's name Jesus — is the act of legal adoption. In Jewish culture, naming a child was the formal act by which a father claimed paternity and established inheritance rights. By naming Jesus, Joseph legally inserted Him into the

Davidic line. The legal genealogy Matthew has just recorded flows to Jesus through this act.

Cross-References: The Virgin Birth and Immanuel

Isaiah 7:14 (virgin / Immanuel) — Isaiah 9:6 (Mighty God, Everlasting Father) — John 1:14 (the Word became flesh) — Galatians 4:4 (born of woman) — Luke 1:35 (the Holy Spirit will come upon you)

III. The Visit of the Magi (2:1-12)

Who Were the Magi? (vv. 1-2)

Matthew 2:1-2 (ESV) *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*

The Magi (Greek: μάγοι, μάγοι) were not kings, and the text does not tell us there were three. That tradition arose later from the three gifts. They were almost certainly astrologer-priests from the Persian or Babylonian court — scholars trained in the observation of celestial phenomena and in the interpretation of ancient literature. The Jewish community had been present in Babylon since the exile, and it is entirely plausible that knowledge of the Messianic prophecies, including Balaam’s prophecy of a star from Jacob (Numbers 24:17), had entered the scholarly tradition of the East.

Their question — Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? — is asked openly in Herod’s capital city. This is an act of startling audacity. They were not asking for a prince or a minor notable; they were asking for a rival king to the man sitting on the throne. The political earthquake of their arrival is registered immediately in verse 3.

Herod's Troubled Reception (vv. 3-8)

Herod's reaction is described with a single Greek word: *etaráchthē* (ἐταράχθη), he was troubled or agitated, and with him all Jerusalem. This is not casual unease. Herod the Great was known for brutal political calculation and the elimination of rivals including members of his own family. The arrival of Gentile scholars seeking a newborn Jewish king would have registered as a direct political threat.

The summoning of the chief priests and scribes is revealing. Herod turns to the religious experts not out of piety but for intelligence. And these scholars — the custodians of the very Scriptures that pointed to Christ — provide the answer without moving a foot toward Bethlehem themselves. The irony is devastating: Gentile outsiders travel hundreds of miles to worship; the Jewish religious establishment knows exactly where to look and stays home.

Matthew 2:6 (ESV) *“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”*

Matthew cites Micah 5:2. The Messiah was prophesied to come from Bethlehem specifically — the city of David. Jesus's birth in Bethlehem is not incidental. It is the convergence of divine planning across seven centuries of prophetic anticipation.

Worship and Warning (vv. 9-12)

The star that the Magi had seen in the East now moves ahead of them and stops over the specific place where the child was. Matthew presents this as a fact. The nature of the celestial phenomenon — whether a supernova, a conjunction of planets, a comet, or a directly miraculous light — is not Matthew's concern. What matters is that God used it to guide Gentile seekers to the Jewish Messiah.

When the Magi enter the house (Greek: *oikiá*, οἰκία — a house, not a stable; they arrived later than the shepherds), they fall down and

worship. The Greek word is *prosekúnēsan* (προσεκύνησαν) — the posture of adoration given to a deity or a king. Their gifts — gold, frankincense, and myrrh — are royal and priestly gifts. Gold befits a king; frankincense was used in priestly worship; myrrh anticipates burial. They worship without yet understanding the full scope of what they are doing.

The warning in a dream not to return to Herod closes the episode. God's protection of His Son extends even to the foreign visitors who sought Him. The Magi depart by a different route, and Herod is outwitted — the first of many times in the Gospel that human power is shown to be impotent against God's purposes.

Cross-References: Bethlehem and the Nations

Micah 5:2 (Bethlehem prophecy) — Numbers 24:17 (the star of Jacob) — Psalm 72:10-11 (kings from distant lands bringing gifts) — Isaiah 60:6 (gold and frankincense brought to honour God)

IV. Egypt, the Massacre, and the Return to Nazareth (2:13-23)

The Flight to Egypt (vv. 13-15)

Matthew 2:13-15 (ESV) *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." He rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."*

Matthew cites Hosea 11:1 — a verse that in its original context refers to God calling the nation of Israel out of Egypt at the Exodus. Matthew applies it to Jesus by what theologians call typological fulfilment: Israel was God's son in a representative sense (Exodus 4:22), called out of

Egypt to be God's people. Jesus is the true Son of God who recapitulates and fulfils Israel's story. Where Israel failed in the wilderness, Jesus will succeed (see Matthew 4). This is not a misuse of the Old Testament; it is reading it the way the New Testament consistently reads it — as a pattern whose full meaning is only visible when Christ arrives.

Again Joseph obeys immediately — he rose and took the child and his mother by night. There is no deliberation, no calculation of personal cost. The pattern of Joseph's faith is worth noting: he is never recorded as speaking a single word in the entire Gospel. His life is one of action and obedience.

The Massacre of the Infants (vv. 16-18)

Matthew 2:18 (ESV) *“A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”*

Herod's massacre of the male children in Bethlehem two years old and under is one of the darkest passages in Matthew's Gospel. The citation from Jeremiah 31:15 places this grief within a long tradition of Israel's suffering. Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19). Her weeping in Jeremiah originally referred to the Babylonian exile. Matthew draws on the same image to express the inconsolable grief of Bethlehem's mothers.

There is no softening of this text. Children die. Their blood is on Herod's hands. Matthew does not explain why God did not prevent it; he records it as part of the historical cost of Herod's violent paranoia. The same God who protected His Son through the warning to Joseph does not appear to intervene for these other children. The text does not invite us to reconcile this with a neat theodicy; it invites us to mourn — and to understand that the world into which the Son of God was born was a world in desperate need of a Saviour.

Return to Nazareth (vv. 19-23)

Matthew 2:23 (ESV) *And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*

The citation “He shall be called a Nazarene” does not appear as a direct verbal quotation in any single Old Testament text. Matthew says “the prophets” (plural), suggesting this is a thematic summary rather than a word-for-word citation. The Hebrew root *netzer* (נֶצֶר), meaning branch or shoot, appears in Isaiah 11:1: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (*netzer*) from his roots shall bear fruit.” The connection between “Nazareth,” “Nazarene,” and *netzer* would have resonated for a Hebrew-reading audience.

Nazareth was also a town of no reputation. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46, ESV) reflects the contempt the town attracted. The Messiah settling in Nazareth — rather than Jerusalem — signals that the Kingdom He inaugurates will not come with the pomp and political machinery that Israel expected. He is the despised and rejected branch of Isaiah 53, growing up in obscurity until the appointed moment.

Cross-References: Israel’s Son and the Branch

Hosea 11:1 (Out of Egypt I called my son) — Jeremiah 31:15 (Rachel weeping) — Isaiah 11:1 (the Branch from Jesse) — Exodus 4:22 (Israel as God’s firstborn son) — Isaiah 53:2-3 (the despised and rejected servant)

Discussion Questions

These questions are designed to require genuine engagement with the text. Work through them carefully before your group meeting.

1. Matthew opens with two royal titles: Son of David and Son of Abraham. What specific Old Testament covenants do these titles

- invoke, and why does their fulfilment in one person matter for understanding who Jesus is?
2. The genealogy includes Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. What do these women have in common that makes their inclusion theologically significant? What does this tell us about the nature of God's grace and His purposes?
 3. The angel says Jesus will save His people from their sins — not from political oppression, poverty, or illness. Why is this the central mission stated at the outset? What would be wrong with a salvation that addressed only external circumstances?
 4. Matthew says the virgin birth fulfils Isaiah 7:14. What is at stake theologically in the virgin birth? What would be lost — doctrinally and personally — if Jesus had a biological human father?
 5. Joseph is described as a just man. His righteousness expresses itself in mercy toward Mary rather than in public accusation. How does his example challenge our understanding of what it means to be righteous? Can you think of a situation where righteousness requires restraint rather than enforcement?
 6. The Magi travel from a distant Gentile nation to worship a Jewish king, while the Jewish religious scholars in Jerusalem know the Scriptures but do not go to Bethlehem. What does this contrast reveal about the nature of true seeking after God? Where do you see yourself in that contrast?
 7. Matthew applies Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I called my son") to Jesus's return from Egypt, even though Hosea was originally speaking of Israel. How does typological interpretation work? Why is it legitimate to read the Old Testament this way? What does it tell us about how the whole Bible is unified?
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Closing Application

Matthew 1-2 does not give us a sentimental nativity. It gives us a theological argument. Jesus is the heir of every promise God ever made. He enters the world in the way God announced centuries in advance. He is protected, guided, and positioned by a God who governs history down to the individual name on a birth record and the route a group of travellers takes home.

The two titles of Matthew 1:1 — Son of David and Son of Abraham — carry a direct claim on every reader. If Jesus is the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant, then He is the rightful King, and every person owes Him allegiance. If He is the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, then the blessing He brings is not for Israel alone but for every nation, tribe, and tongue. The name Immanuel declares that this King is not remote or indifferent; He has come among us.

The question Matthew raises in chapter 2 — through the contrast between the Magi who worshipped and the scholars who stayed home — is a question every reader must answer personally: Do you know where He is? And will you go?

Matthew 1:21 (ESV) *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*

Key Cross-References

Old Testament Foundations

- Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17-18 — The Abrahamic covenant: blessing to all nations through his seed
- 2 Samuel 7:12-16 — The Davidic covenant: an eternal throne and kingdom
- Isaiah 7:14 — The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Immanuel

- Isaiah 9:6 — The child who is Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace
- Isaiah 11:1 — A branch (netzer) from the root of Jesse
- Micah 5:2 — Out of Bethlehem shall come the ruler of Israel
- Numbers 24:17 — A star shall come out of Jacob
- Hosea 11:1 — Out of Egypt I called my son
- Jeremiah 31:15 — Rachel weeping for her children

New Testament Connections

- Luke 1:26-38 — The annunciation to Mary from Luke's perspective
- John 1:1-18 — The Word became flesh: the theological depth behind Immanuel
- Galatians 3:16, 29 — The seed of Abraham is Christ
- Galatians 4:4 — Born of a woman, born under the Law
- Hebrews 11:31 — Rahab's faith in the Hall of Faith

Next Study: Matthew 2 — John the Baptist and the Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 3:1-4:25)