



**SECOND
SUNDAY**

STUDY GUIDE FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2018

“*Matthew: Birth of Jesus*” Matthew 1:1-17 (selected), 1:18-24

¹ A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:
² Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers...

³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Aram.

⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse. ⁶ Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah...

¹⁵ Eliud was the father of Eleazar. Eleazar was the father of Matthan. Matthan was the father of Jacob. ¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary—of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ. ¹⁷ So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to Babylon to the Christ.

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly.

²⁰ As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled: ²³ *Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, And they will call him, Emmanuel. (Emmanuel means “God with us.”) [Isaiah 7:14]*

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him, “Jesus.”

BACKGROUND

THE BIRTH OF JESUS – Only the Gospels of Matthew and Luke have narratives about the birth of Jesus. Luke begins with the coming of John the Baptist late in life to Zechariah and Elizabeth. John is believed to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of the coming of “one who would prepare the way” for the Messiah. In Luke, there is the angelic announcement to young Mary and the trek of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem where they find “no room at the inn.”

The Gospel of Matthew contains quite a different birth narrative which begins with a genealogy tracing the lineage of Jesus to that of the founding patriarch of the Israelites, Abraham. Importantly, that bloodline also includes that of King David to whom the Lord had promised that there would always be one of his lineage on the throne of Israel.

Of the four Gospels, Matthew is most concerned with building a case for Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of the prophecy for the promised *messiah* or *Christ*. Throughout his gospel there are references to these Old Testament prophecies in relation to Jesus.

Prior to becoming part of the accepted “canon” of the New Testament, it's likely that the individual gospels circulated on their own for a certain amount of time. In other words, initially, those who received Matthew would have not been aware of the separate birth account in Luke.

JEWISH WEDDING CUSTOMS – As in much of the ancient world and even today beyond Western culture, marriage was taken very seriously. Arrangements were made between families, not between the espoused. The announcement of the engagement was tantamount to a wedding decree and would be made some time before the marriage which was a three-day celebration. To break off an engagement was both shameful and required religious legal work. The dowry would also be returned.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What **surprises** you or is of special interest for you about this passage? What **questions** might you ask about it?
- The Gospel of Matthew begins with a **genealogy**. The English word “record,” actually comes from the Greek word for “Genesis.” Have you developed a genealogy of **your family**? Why is finding yourself on a family **significant** to you? Why do you think including such a **list might have been important to Matthew**? Can you think of **other genealogies** in the Bible?
- **Five women** are named in the genealogy. Can you spot them? It’s likely that at least two of were **non-Jews**. Can you see any significance for Matthew to include these women?
- Hebrew consonants were given **numerical** values. The count of the letters of the name David, (D-V-D) add up to **fourteen**, hence the convenient organization of the entire genealogy into three sets of fourteen relationships to emphasize Joseph’s relation to King David. Scholars, comparing this list to references both within and outside the Bible, cannot verify the accuracy of this list: it differs from a similar genealogy in Luke. Does this difference in lack of detail or even accuracy **make a difference** in your understanding of these verses?
- In Verse 18, the “birth” of Jesus also represents the Greek word for “Genesis.” The Greek does not use the word, “pregnant” but euphemistically says “a child was discovered in her womb.” Mary understood the source of her pregnancy – the Holy Spirit - but, at this point, Joseph does not. He is a “**righteous**” man, meaning he is just and follows the rules. In the Greek, he chooses not “expose her” but rather simply “to send her away.” What might have been **going through Joseph’s mind** at this point to guide his choices?
- Joseph was likely troubled by this situation but is guided by a dream. **Dreams were significant** in the Bible, evidence of God’s guidance and help. Can you think of **other dreams** in the Old and New Testaments? It’s revealed to Joseph that he needn’t be troubled by Mary’s status: it’s the work of **God’s Holy Spirit**, and the baby boy is to be named “**Jesus**” (Note: translation necessary for Gentile Christians, “someone **who will save people from their sins**” – the Greek version of Joshua.) The inference of “people” here is the Jews or people of Israel. **What do you think Joseph made** of this new information? Even knowing this, what might be **further consequences** for them of Mary’s pregnancy?
- Fulfillment of **Old Testament prophecy** is very important to Matthew as he quotes here from Isaiah 7. Importantly, however, Old Testament prophets preached **first and foremost to their immediate time and audience**. Later Christian interpreters always make a kind of leap to apply it to events in the New Testament. Interestingly, Matthew quotes not from the Hebrew but from the Greek translation of the Bible, the “septuagint.” In the original Hebrew in Isaiah, the word is Hebrew for “**young woman**,” but Hebrew scholars translating Isaiah into Greek, still decades before Mary became pregnant, preferred the Greek word, “**virgin**.” Joseph is faithful and does as the angel asks. How important to you is it that Jesus came as the **fulfillment of the Old Testament**? How does this passage about Joseph affect your understanding of the **birth narrative in Luke**? How would the our understanding of Jesus’ coming be different without **Matthew 1**?