

The birth of Jesus Christ...

Matthew 1 and 2

Matthew's is the 'first gospel' – it was seen as a 'prestigious' gospel in the early church, because it had some significant portions of Jesus' teaching not included in other gospels, such as a fuller version of the Sermon on the Mount. In addition, it was the only one of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to have an apostolic author. Furthermore, the Jewish flavour of the Gospel of Matthew makes for a logical transition between the Old and New Testaments.

For these reasons, the early church placed it first in order among the four gospel accounts. The author is Matthew (also known as Levi), who was a former tax collector before he followed Jesus as a disciple; his former profession required that he be able to take short-hand, which suggests he may have been able to record some of the Jesus' sayings *verbatim* (such as the Sermon on the Mount in Chapters 5 to 7, the Kingdom Parables in Chapter 13, and the Olivet Discourse in Chapters 24 and 25).

The theme of this gospel is 'Jesus as King and Messiah'. The key phrase "this was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet" occurs some 16 times in this gospel. Matthew shows Jesus as the rightful Messiah of Israel, fulfilling many prophecies...

The genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1 v 1 to 17)

This genealogy establishes Jesus' claim to the throne of David through his adoptive father Joseph. This is not his blood lineage through Mary (given in Luke 3 v 23 to 38), but his legal lineage through Joseph. See also 'the two genealogies of Jesus Christ' – file attached.

Matthew's genealogy includes four women: Tamar (v 3), Rahab (v 5), Ruth (v 5), Bathsheba (v 6). Women were rarely mentioned in ancient genealogies, and the four mentioned here are worthy of special note as examples of God's grace. They show how God can take unlikely people and use them in great ways: (i) *Tamar* sold herself as a prostitute to her father-in-law Judah to bring forth Perez and Zerah; (ii) *Rahab* was a Gentile prostitute, for whom God took extraordinary measures to save from judgment and her lifestyle of prostitution; (iii) *Ruth* was a Gentile, from Moab; and (iv) Uriah's wife (*Bathsheba*) was infamous for her adulterous relationship with David. How do these verses indicate that the coming of Jesus was God's plan from the beginning?

The birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1 v 18 to 25)

- What do these verses teach us about the virgin birth?
- Why is this truth so fundamentally important?
- What does this passage teach us about the person, character and work of Jesus Christ?

The visit of the Magi (Matthew 2 v 1 to 12)

- How did King Herod react to the news of Jesus' birth?
- Do you think he really meant to worship him (v 8)?
- The "chief priests and teachers of the law" seemed to know all about the situation. Were they keen to worship the child?
- How did the wise men react? What did they do (v 9 to 11)?

[MORE OVER...]

The escape to Egypt and the return to Nazareth (Matthew 2 v 13 to 23)

- Consider the character of Joseph, as portrayed in these two chapters – what can we learn from his courageous obedience?
- Note the accuracy of fulfilment of prophecies in Jesus' infancy (v 15, 17, 18, 23). What does this teach us about the nature and authority of prophecy?

No specific passage in the Old Testament says “He shall be called a Nazarene” (v 23, KJV). However, Isaiah 11 v 1 says “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit”, and the Hebrew word for ‘branch’ (נֶצֶר, *netser*) sounds like ‘Nazar’. So the epithet ‘Nazarene’ could mean: ‘the man of Nazareth, the town of the little branch’. Nazareth was a little, dirty town. It was treated with contempt by the exalted Pharisees and the common people alike. Yet, it was the soil, perhaps we should say the ‘branch’, out of which Christ grew. His enemies associated Jesus with this city as a slur; but he wore the title as a badge of honour...

Prayer – Lord, thank you for Matthew's Gospel, the first book of the New Testament. Help us not only to read and hear the words of this gospel, but to take them to heart, and to be faithful and obedient to the truth of Your Word. Amen.