

THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW

Part I: Preparation for Jesus the Messiah
Chapters 1:1-4:16

ASBURY

Start Here.

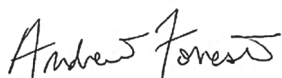
What you hold in your hands is a priceless treasure, a masterpiece, a work of beauty, mystery, and incendiary power. Matthew's Gospel is without question one of the most influential documents in the history of the world, perhaps the most influential document in the history of the world. This Gospel has been pored over by candlelight, smuggled into prisons, and stored in the memories of people who wanted to learn more about one extraordinary man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The claim that Matthew's Gospel makes about Jesus is explosive: that Jesus is Israel's Messiah, that the God of Israel has come to save his people (and through them the whole world) in the person of Jesus, and that Jesus's Crucifixion and Resurrection has permanently defeated death and evil.

This Gospel opens with a genealogy that connects Jesus to the long line of Abraham, thereby showing that the entire Old Testament has led to Jesus, who is the fulfilment and culmination of Israel's story, and it ends with the Risen Jesus commanding his followers to go to the entire world to teach other people to obey and follow him.

Matthew set all this down in his Gospel for exactly that reason: so we could understand, obey, and follow after Jesus.

Let's do it.



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P.S. Want to receive these daily readings and commentary each weekday morning in your inbox? Sign up on my website: www.andrewforrest.org

WHAT IS A "GOSPEL"?

"Gospel" is the Old English translation of a Greek word that we transliterate as *euangelion*—pronounced "you-ahng-gell-lee-on"—which means "good news" or "good tidings." You know the story of

the Battle of Marathon, how the messenger ran 26 miles to Athens to bring the breathless news of the great Greek victory over the Persians? The message he was bringing was *euangelion*—it is good news about something that has happened in the world. It wasn't originally a religious word, but a political word. In fact, the early Christians adopted it for their purposes because they understood that what had happened with Jesus was news about something amazing that had taken place, that it was (to quote the angel in Luke's Gospel),

"Good news of great joy that will be for all the people!" [Luke 2:10]

This good news was carried from Jerusalem by followers of Jesus all over the world; when it came to the Anglo-Saxon people in what we now call England, the martyrs and missionaries translated it into the tongue of that place, and they called their message "gospel."

The early Christians called the Jesus news "gospel," and they also came to call the documents that contained that news "Gospels."

There are four Gospels in our Bibles, and each one gives a slightly different perspective on Jesus. The one we'll be reading through here is the one according to Matthew, i.e., Matthew's Gospel.

WHAT IS A "DISCIPLE"?

The concept of discipleship is important in Matthew. Disciple means student (the Greek word is pronounced *math-uh-tase*, from which we get our word "mathematics"); or a better English translation might be *apprentice*. A disciple was someone who was in training to become like the master.

THE TWO KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Matthew's Gospel begins like this:

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David,
the son of Abraham. [1:1]*

And it ends like this:

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and

said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
[28:16-20]

Those bookends give us the keys to understanding Matthew.

INTERPRETATIVE KEY #1

Matthew begins by telling us that Jesus is the son of Abraham, i.e., he is the culmination of Israel’s story. This means that the entire Old Testament has been leading up to Jesus. **The first key to understanding Matthew is to see everything about Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel as connected to and fulfilling the Old Testament story.** In every passage, ask, “How does this information about Jesus relate to the Old Testament story?”

What to Do When You Think You Understand What You’re Reading

If you understand a particular passage or episode, *look deeper for the Old Testament connection*—there is more going on that first appears, and the Old Testament connection will greatly broaden your understanding!

What to Do When You Don’t Understand What You’re Reading

If you don’t understand what you’re reading, there’s a good chance you’re missing the Old Testament connection. So, ask yourself, “How does this story fulfill or complete an Old Testament story?”

INTERPRETATIVE KEY #2

Matthew ends by telling us that Jesus’s final instructions to his disciples were to teach other people everything Jesus had taught them.

Which raises the question, “What did Jesus teach?” The entire Gospel of Matthew is the answer.

Matthew is an instruction manual for discipleship. It is meant to give readers what they need to know to become a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.

So, when you get to the last words of Matthew and the instruction to make disciples, you’re forced to go back and start all over again!

The Question to Keep in Mind as You Read

If you were an apprentice to Jesus, what would this passage teach you about following him? Of all the things Matthew *could* have told us, why did he think that we needed to know this to be apprentices of Jesus?

OUR READING PLAN

Like the rest of the Bible, Matthew's Gospel can only be understood through repeated, attentive reading. Accordingly, I've parceled out the readings at a slow pace; each particular day's passage is short and very manageable and it is my hope therefore that you'll have time to go back and re-read a previous day or days and see how it all connects. (The readings are assigned on weekdays only—all the more reason to take your time and read and re-read on the weekends.)

THE COMMENTARY

Each day I've written some commentary to go with the reading; the commentary is NOT the point—Matthew's words are the point—but I offer the commentary to help you get something out of what you've read each day. Some days I've interspersed the commentary in the midst of the reading, and some days the reading is given in its entirety all at once.

THE SHAPE OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL¹

Matthew can best be understood as being made up of three main sections:

Part 1 – Preparation for Jesus the Messiah [1:1-4:16];

Part 2 – Proclamation of Jesus the Messiah to Israel [4:17-16:20];

Part 3 – Passion and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah [16:21-28:20].

Accordingly, our reading plan will be divided up into three books; in this volume (Part 1) we will read about both the origins of Jesus—his genealogy and his infancy—and the events that lead up to the launch of his public ministry—the ministry of John the Baptism and the baptism and temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Part 1 begins on Monday, August 21. Part 2 begins on Monday, September 11; Part 3 on Monday, October 30.

¹I'm indebted to David Bauer for this insight, and recommend his book, *The Gospel of the Son of God: An Introduction to Matthew*.

There is much more to say about Matthew than I could fit in this little reading guide; I will be preaching through Matthew from August to December 2023, and also teaching a series of churchwide Bible studies in that same period on the following Wednesdays:

August 30

September 13

October 11

November 8

The Bible studies will be held at 6:30-8:00 PM in the Sanctuary of Asbury Church and are for all ages. (They will also be livestreamed at www.asburytulsa.org.)

The Gospel of Matthew is like an iceberg, in that when you first look at it, it seems obvious what it is—the basic story is fairly straightforward. However, what really matters is what’s below the surface, and when you slow down and pay attention, the message of Matthew’s Gospel will shock you. What’s below the surface is IMMENSE and immensely powerful.

If you’re willing to work through Matthew, I’m going to make two bold promises:

1. You will come to understand and *love* it;
2. You won’t ever be the same.

Let’s go.

—AF

ORDER FOR DAILY PRAYER

In a Bible study or small group?

Feel free to use the order below to provide some structure to your gathering.

1. GREETING

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

2. THE INVITATORY

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

O God, make speed to save us;

O Lord, make haste to help us;

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

3. OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. SCRIPTURE LESSON

The day's scripture is read and briefly expounded.

5. PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory For ever and ever.

Amen

6A. MORNING PRAYER

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day, and we ask that you drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

6B. EVENING PRAYER

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night and so thereby bring us in safety to the morning hours. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all this we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

7. CLOSING BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace;
And now may the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Be with us and remain with us now and forever. Amen.

OCCASIONAL PRAYERS

I have included below some occasional prayers that you may find helpful. Often at a birth or a death I find myself fumbling for the right words to say, and these occasional prayers have been a help to me. (I'd suggest copying to your phone the ones that seem most useful to you, so you can easily text them to others when the need arises.)

A GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

or

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR OUR NATION

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure conduct. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom, in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A BIRTHDAY

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servant *N.* as he begins another year. Grant that he may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen his trust in your goodness all the days of his life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A CHILD, OR FOR A BIRTHDAY

Watch over your child *N.*, O Lord, as his days increase; bless him and guide him, and keep him unspotted from the world. Strengthen him when he stands; comfort him when discouraged or sorrowful; raise him up if he falls; and in his heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of his life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A MARRIAGE OR ANNIVERSARY

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send your blessing upon these your servants [as they begin another year], that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he conquered death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

FOR OUR ENEMIES

O God, the Creator of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen.

FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant *N.* the help of your power, that his sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Rest eternal grant to *N.*, O Lord; and may his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

FOR DESIRING GOD

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you forever. Amen.

FOR A PERSON IN TROUBLE OR BEREAVEMENT

O merciful Father, you have taught us in your holy Word that you do not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men: Look with pity on the sorrows of your servant *N*. Remember *him*, O Lord, in mercy; nourish *his* soul with patience; comfort *him* with a sense of your goodness; lift up your countenance upon *him*; and give *him* peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THE DISCOURAGED AND DOWNCAST

O God, almighty and merciful, you heal the broken-hearted, and turn the sadness of the sorrowful to joy: Let your fatherly goodness be upon all whom you have made. Remember in pity all those who are this day destitute, homeless, elderly, infirm, or forgotten. Bless the multitude of your poor. Lift up those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all who are discouraged and downcast, and by your heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose poverty tempts them to sin. Though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they are perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him who for our sakes became poor, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOR HELP TO BEAR BEREAVEMENT

Heavenly Father, help us to entrust our loved ones to your care. Though sorrow darkens our lives, help us to look up to you, remembering the cloud of witnesses by which we are surrounded. And grant that we on earth, rejoicing ever in your presence, may share with them the rest and peace which your presence gives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR QUIET CONFIDENCE

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(I've selected these prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

MONDAY, AUGUST 21

MATTHEW 1:1

I The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew begins by giving us a one-sentence overview of the entire book that will follow.

The word here translated in the English Standard Version [ESV] as “genealogy” is the Greek word *genesis*, which means “origins” or “beginnings.” Jesus’s story really begins way back at the beginning, with Abraham. To Abraham God gave a promise and said that through Abraham, all the people on earth would be blessed (see Genesis 12:1-3). Finally, thousands of years later, that promise is coming to fulfilment. By telling us that Jesus is the son of Abraham, Matthew is telling us that Jesus is the culmination of Israel’s story. This means that the entire Old Testament has been leading up to Jesus. **The first key to understanding Matthew is to see everything about Jesus as connected to and fulfilling the Old Testament story.** Or, to put it another way, the entire Old Testament story was always about Jesus, and the entire story of Israel is now *embodied in* Jesus.

But not only is Jesus the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham, we also learn that the way Jesus will bring blessing to the entire world is by fulfilling God’s promise to King David; God promised David that

¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. [2 Samuel 7]

The Israelites held onto the hope that a king from the line of David would come and deliver them from all their enemies and troubles.

David was king in Jerusalem around 1000 BC, and over the long centuries after his death, his descendants on the throne failed to live up to God’s covenant promises. As a result of their failures and the idolatry of God’s people, in 586 BC the Babylonians came and conquered Jerusalem. Israel ceased to be an independent kingdom, and the line of David went underground. But the line continued and ultimately led to Joseph, the (adopted) father of Jesus.

Jesus, then, is the culmination of Israel’s story and the long-awaited king from the line of David who would deliver his people.

With one sentence, Matthew sets us up for all that will follow.

Let’s GO.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 22

MATTHEW 1:2-6A

THE SCANDALOUS HISTORY OF THE FAMILY OF JESUS

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

The reason modern Bible readers find genealogies so boring is because we read them the wrong way. We read them as if they are there just to give us a family tree, but for the biblical authors, genealogies are theological statements, and each name is a hyperlink² meant to evoke the complicated stories and lessons that each name signifies. Our problem is that we don't know the biblical story well enough to get the hyperlinks. (The only solution to our ignorance is just to start reading the Bible!)

For example, Matthew mentions the names Judah and Tamar in the genealogy of Jesus. The reference is to a truly scandalous story whereby Judah fathers twin boys with his daughter-in-law Tamar who is posing as a roadside prostitute! (Read it in Genesis 38.) Why would Matthew mention such an outrageous story?

Matthew is deliberately reminding us of the long, morally convoluted history of Israel so as to show us both that Jesus will save his people from their sins and show us that there is nothing that God can't use for his purposes.

Nothing.

P.S. The entire genealogy works like that. Here's a great article from Bible Project that goes into some detail about the names Matthew mentions: bibleproject.com/articles/jesus-genealogies/.

² I first heard Tim Mackie from Bible Project use the term hyperlink when talking about the Bible, a term which I think perfectly captures what the biblical authors are doing. Imagine reading a Wikipedia article—it's full of hyperlinks that take you to another article to read more. That's the way the Bible works! A single word or phrase is meant to invoke the entire story behind it, and the whole Bible is like a web of connections.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23

MATTHEW 1:6B-11

THE FAILURES OF DAVID AND HIS SONS

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah,⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah,¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Remember that Jesus is introduced to us in v.1 as “son of David.” He is the fulfillment of David’s royal line, the promised King who will deliver God’s people. Which is a good thing, because the history of David and his sons is one of (almost) complete failure. The descendants of David on the throne in Jerusalem break God’s law and lead the people into idolatry and even (at times) human sacrifice! (See 2 Kings 16:2-4, e.g.)

Matthew makes a point of reminding us that King David himself was an adulterer and a murderer:

David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah [1:6].

Great art shows more than it tells, and the Bible is great art. Propaganda hits you over the head, but art makes you use your head. Look at how elegantly Matthew causes us to remember the moral failings of Israel’s greatest king, David, without coming out and saying so directly—he expects us to know the story and draw the accurate conclusion.

If you know the story, you’ll know that David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband Uriah murdered. It’s a shameful story (see 2 Samuel 11), but the story of David’s descendants isn’t any better, and ultimately their failures lead to the Babylonian conquest in 586 BC.

But God is faithful to his promises, and the story doesn't end there.

Today, the temptation is to believe that we can extrapolate from our current circumstances how the future will occur. But God is working in history in surprising ways, and The End will be good. Don't be discouraged!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 24

MATTHEW 1:12-17

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN ORDINARY LIFE

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

What the genealogy of Jesus does is show us something very important: it shows that Jesus came from a particular people in a particular part of the world. Jesus was Jewish, a son of Abraham, an Israelite. This point cannot be overstated: God chose one particular family to be his means to save the world, and when the time was right, God came as a baby in a particular manger in Bethlehem. **God uses the ordinary realities of everyday life as part of his ultimate plan.** This means that God wants to use your ordinary decisions today as part of his plan. Either you are working with God, or against him. Which will it be today?

P.S. Note how Matthew breaks the pattern "X was the father of Y, Y was the father of Z" when he gets to Joseph and Mary—he is setting us up for the miracle of the Virgin Birth.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 25

MATTHEW 1:18-25

A SMALL, QUIET ACT OF INTEGRITY

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

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

I’ve always found v. 19 to be a quietly moving line: “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” That decision of Joseph was a small, selfless act of kindness on which the fate of the world turned—if he had made a public spectacle of Mary, then history would have been different and the Jesus story might not have happened.

Don’t underestimate the importance of a small, unnoticed act of selfless kindness today. Who knows what hangs in the balance?

P.S. The act of naming a child is *de facto* adoption, so when Joseph—per the angel’s instructions—calls the child “Jesus” he is adopting him into the Davidic line.

MONDAY, AUGUST 28

MATTHEW 2:1-6

GOLD AND FRANKINCENSE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

2 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, ² 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.”³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him,

“In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ “ ‘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.’ ”

We were told that Jesus was the son of Abraham, that is that Jesus is the descendant that will bring God’s blessings to the nations (see Genesis 12:1-3). Here at Jesus’s birth we have the first representatives of the gentile nations coming to worship Jesus—and they are pagan astrologers from Babylon!

Remember that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament story. This passage in Isaiah foretold the nations coming to worship:

60 *Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

² *For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.*

³ *And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.*

⁴ *Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.*

⁵ *Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,^[a]
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.*

⁶ *A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. [Isaiah 60:1-6]*

THOUGHT FOR DAY

Isaiah foretold what would happen! I just can't get over this passage—foreigners who come bringing gold and frankincense. **That's exactly what happened!**

Tell someone about this cool connection today.

(Why didn't Isaiah mention myrrh? This is because God is always adding something new and unexpected, like a jazz artist riffing on a familiar theme, but also creating something new. When myrrh was given by the Magi to the Holy Family, it signified the death that Jesus was to die.)

TUESDAY, AUGUST 29

MATTHEW 2:7-12

WHAT DIFFERENT ROUTE DO YOU NEED TO TAKE TODAY?

⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

I think the Magi are among the most interesting characters in the Bible. Probably some kind of Persian or Babylonian stargazers--"wise men"--they saw something in the heavens so compelling that they left their homes and temples and libraries miles away to the East, and journeyed toward Bethlehem. And when they got there, what did they see?

Whatever it was, it changed them. I love how T.S. Eliot imagines them on their return home:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.

—from *"The Journey of the Magi,"* by T.S. Eliot

Matthew is more matter-of-fact: "They returned to their country by another route." See, here's the truth: encounters with Jesus are always like that. You can't meet Jesus and continue on as before, unchanged.

What different route or path do you need to take today?

**BIBLE STUDY TONIGHT | 6:30 PM | SANCTUARY
LIVESTREAM: asburytulsa.online.church**

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30

MATTHEW 2:13-23

HEROD WAS RIGHT

¹³ 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." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "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."

¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go

there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ 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.

Today's reading contains the evil story of the Slaughter of the Innocents in Bethlehem, in which King Herod orders all little boys in Bethlehem's vicinity two years-old and younger to be murdered. Matthew then quotes from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (who was himself alluding to the Book of Genesis):

*"Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:
'A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.'"*
[Matthew 2:17-18]

It's a miserable story, and Herod was an evil man. But he was right.

Herod wasn't right because he had those boys murdered; Herod was right because he rightly understood that this Jesus is a threat to all dictators and demons. Even today, the Chinese totalitarians are using the vast resources of their hellish surveillance state to stamp out peaceful followers of Jesus. Why? Because if Jesus is the true King, then the powers of this world will be held to account; if Jesus is the true King, then one day his Kingdom will come fully on earth as it already is in heaven.

Don't be fooled: all the rival powers are mere pretenders and will one day be finally overthrown.

What would it look like for you to worship the true King today?

Join us **TONIGHT** for our first churchwide Bible study on the Gospel of Matthew.
6:30-8:00 PM
Sanctuary, Asbury Church
All ages.
Livestream available: www.asburytulsa.org

If you live in Tulsa, I'm going to stick my neck out and say that these Bible studies are DO NOT MISS events. The Lord is doing something

exciting at Asbury, and the Bible studies we've had over the past year on Genesis and Revelation were *electric*.
Please do whatever you can to be present tonight.

If you live out of town, go ahead and move to Tulsa. If that won't work, then join us on the livestream!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31

MATTHEW 3:1-6

WHAT DID BAPTISM ORIGINALLY SIGNIFY?

3 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ³For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.’ ”

⁴Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

In 586 BC the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar came and completed his conquest of Jerusalem. The walls were broken down, the Temple was razed, and the Jerusalem elite were carried off into exile in Babylon, hundreds of miles to the east in what is present-day Iraq. When the exiles returned to the land of Israel decades later, they had to cross the Jordan River—from the east—to get back home.

Centuries later, a man named John went out to the Jordan River and started preaching. (This was roughly in 30 AD.) His message was a call for the Jews to prepare for the coming Messiah by repenting—changing direction. He immersed people in the Jordan River in a way that signified cleansing and renewal. The idea was that it was time for the people to come home from spiritual exile. And baptism was the sign they took their sins seriously, were eager to repent, and were ready.

John was dressed like the great Old Testament prophet Elijah; the Old Testament foretold that a man like Elijah would come again to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Jesus is the one who will finally bring his people out of exile—the rest of Matthew is an explanation of how he will do that and what

the coming Kingdom is like. (Hint: the Sermon on the Mount is a description of life in the Kingdom—see chapters 5-7.)

The baptism of John is an immersion of the entire self, because the coming Kingdom of Jesus will require a hokey-pokey level of commitment: you have to put your whole self in.

Find a quiet 15 minutes today and ask yourself, “What am I holding back from Jesus, and why? What am I afraid of?”

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

MATTHEW 3:7-12

THE SPIRITUAL DANGER OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

God chose one man—Abraham—and his family—Israel—to be the people who would carry God’s message and blessings to the entire world (see Genesis 12:1-3). But what happens with the chosen people aren’t faithful? What happens when they turn their back on God?

Most of the Old Testament is the sad story of how Israel’s unfaithfulness brings pain and suffering into the world, rather than blessing. But now Jesus, who is the True Israelite who embodies all of Israel, has come to bring God’s blessing to the nations and to free Israel from its spiritual exile. John the Baptist is preparing the way for Jesus’s ministry, and calling the people to change their minds and change their direction (this is what the biblical concept of repentance means) so they will be ready for the coming Kingdom.

The problem is that many of the Jews believe that they are going to be included in the Kingdom just because they are biological descendants of Abraham. John calls them out of their delusional self-righteousness:

“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John is here foretelling how the Messiah will bring into Abraham’s family people from the nations—the Gentiles—who repent and trust him, and that if Israel doesn’t change direction and change behavior, judgement will fall on them.

This is both good news and bad news for us today.

The good news is that Jesus has brought the blessings of God to the nations with his life, death, and resurrection, and now life in the Holy Spirit is possible to all—even people like me, non-Jews—who repent of their sins and trust him.

The bad news is that the message of John applies to us today. Many American Christians are arrogantly confident that because they prayed The Sinner’s Prayer and have their names on a church membership roll somewhere, that they can continue to live in sin and open rebellion to God. But saving faith is obedient faith, and if we are not “bearing fruit worth of repentance,” just like the unrepentant Jews of John’s day, we are in danger of being chopped down and thrown into the fire.

Do not believe that just because you are an American Christian you are exempt from God’s expectation that you live a faithful life.

But it’s not too late! As long as we are breathing, God’s not done with us yet, which means we can change direction before it’s too late.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4 [LABOR DAY]

MATTHEW 3:13-17

WHY DID JESUS NEED TO BE BAPTIZED?

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Why did Jesus need to be baptized? John is baptizing to prepare the people for repentance because their sins have kept them in spiritual exile. But Jesus isn't sinful, and in fact, John is troubled when Jesus approaches for baptism: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

John misunderstands the nature of Jesus's mission and ministry, for Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's story and their representative who is taking their covenant responsibilities on himself. He is the Davidic king who intercedes for the people.

“Jesus submits to baptism not because he has sin to confess and repent of, but because it is God's will that Jesus identify with the people in their need so as to deliver them. Ironically, in this act of identification with sinners Jesus demonstrates his righteousness, for the divine declaration of approval comes immediately in the wake of Jesus' baptism.”

—David Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God*

And it is after the baptism that God himself confirms both Jesus's act and his identity. It is after he identifies with sinful Israel that Jesus is vindicated.

(We'll see this pattern reoccur later at the Crucifixion and then Resurrection.)

There is something particularly close to the heart of God when God's

people intercede for those who don't deserve it—when they step into the gap, so to speak. This was always God's intention for Abraham and his family (see Abraham's intercession for Sodom, in Genesis 18:16-33, e.g.), and when God's people actually do it—when they intercede for others, when they stand in the gap—blessing is released. Jesus is the ultimate example of this, of course, but the same applies today for the followers of Jesus.

For whom can you intercede today? How can you stand in the gap for someone who doesn't deserve it?

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

MATTHEW 4:1-4

A LEGITIMATE NEED IN AN ILLEGITIMATE WAY

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

" 'Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

In yesterday's reading, we saw how the Father gives the Spirit to the Son at the Baptism of Jesus. The Spirit then leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

The Temptation of Jesus is a re-enactment of Israel's temptation and wanderings in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt, and each of the three temptations involves being willing to trust that God will provide provision on God's timing.

It seems as if the devil heard the Father's words at the baptism: "This is my beloved Son." And it is as the Son that Jesus is tempted:

"Since you are the Son, why don't you...?"

There is nothing wrong with being hungry and needing food. In fact, Jesus's response shows that eating bread is not the problem—

“Man does not live by bread alone.” The problem is that bread without learning to trust God sets us up for failure.

“The temptation from Satan, then, is that Jesus should distrust God by taking the responsibility for his life on himself. Jesus remembers, however, that trustful submission to God’s word is as necessary for true existence as food itself.”

—David Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God*

Jesus replies to each temptation with a verse from Deuteronomy 6-8, which in its original context is a sermon from Moses to the Israelites in the wilderness, preparing them to enter the Promised Land.

As we will see in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’s worldview is that God can be trusted to provide all our needs, no matter what, and so therefore we ought to live without anxiety.

Where do you need to choose to trust God’s provision today?

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

MATTHEW 4:5-7

THE TIME THE DEVIL QUOTED SCRIPTURE AT JESUS!

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’
and “ ‘On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

In the second temptation, the devil quotes part of Psalm 91, and I think it’s fair to assume that the devil’s interpretation is wrong!

Psalm 91 is a beautiful psalm of protection and peace, but the devil wants Jesus to believe that what the psalm means is that God’s Servant will face no problems or difficulties. The devil wants Jesus to see the

psalm as a magic formula—if you say it, then God will be forced to do what you want; praying Psalm 91 will call God to send his angels to save you, like, like a divine Bat Signal in the sky.

Jesus again replies with a verse from Deuteronomy when he says that testing God in an attempt to force God's hand is wrong.

God's promises *are* true, but we don't control God—he's not a cosmic vending machine that we manipulate. He works on his own timeline.

Where do you need to make a conscious choice to trust God's timing today?

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

MATTHEW 4:8-11

CROSS BEFORE CROWN

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.’ ”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

The essence of the devil's testing of Jesus in the Wilderness in Matthew 4 is about suffering. The crucial question: is there a shortcut through suffering for Jesus?

Jesus and the devil are in agreement: Jesus will reign in the end. The question is, can he receive his glory without going through suffering? Look carefully and see that the temptations are all about a shortcut through suffering: food instead of fasting, safety instead of danger, the crown without the cross.

The temptation for Jesus to avoid suffering must have been nearly irresistible.

Nearly irresistible, but not ultimately so. Jesus resists. He knows that, for whatever reason, there is no shortcut through suffering in this life. For whatever reason, the cross comes before the crown.

I wish I could tell you that it is possible to live life without difficulty, but that would be a lie. The good news, though, is that there is nothing unusual about your difficulties--everyone has trials. The even better news is that God redeems all that he allows, and that our "present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

So, there's no shortcut through suffering. It's just one foot in front of the other. But, be hopeful: the Lord has something amazing planned at the end.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

MATTHEW 4:12-16

¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned."

Note: Today concludes Part 1 of our Matthew reading plan, which was all about **The Preparation** for Jesus the Messiah. Part 2 begins on Monday, September 11 and will be about **The Proclamation** of Jesus as Israel's Messiah. Part 2 will run through the end of October. Get pumped!

The preparations are complete for Jesus's ministry to begin. John's arrest by Herod (which Matthew doesn't tell us about until chapter 14) means that the time is right for Jesus to launch his ministry in Israel, a ministry that will be about proclaiming the Kingdom and his role as Israel's Messiah. He begins his ministry in Galilee, in the ancient area

that was assigned to the Israelite tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. And Matthew reminds us that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah had foretold a time when a brilliant hope would come upon the people of Israel, starting in the area of Galilee:

9 *But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

² *The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.*
³ *You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*

⁴ *For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

⁵ *For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

⁶ *For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon^[d] his shoulder,
and his name shall be called^[e]
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

⁷ *Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

—Isaiah 9:1-7

Once again, we see that God's plan has been working toward Jesus all along.

In the same way, God is working history toward its goal even now.

Be hopeful today! It's a good ending!

NOTES

NOTES

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