

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Genealogy and Birth of Jesus

Matthew 1:1-25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 1 is the doorway into the entire Gospel, and a remarkable amount of New Testament theology is pressed into a single chapter. What is doctrinally at stake here is nothing less than the identity of Jesus. Matthew insists that Jesus is the legal son of David through Joseph, and therefore the rightful heir to the throne God promised would last forever (2 Samuel 7). He is the son of Abraham, through whom the blessing promised to all nations finally arrives (Genesis 12). He is conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, so that He is truly God with us, Immanuel, and not merely a great teacher or another prophet. And His very name announces His mission: He will save His people from their sins. Get the identity of Jesus right here, and the rest of the Gospel opens up. Get it wrong, and everything that follows is distorted.

At the same time, this chapter was never written merely to settle a doctrinal question. Matthew is forming hearts. He puts Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba into the family tree of the Messiah so that no one in your class will ever again believe their past is too dark for God's grace. He shows us a righteous man, Joseph, who lays down his reputation to obey God, so that your students will be challenged where their own obedience is costly. The aim is not only that they would believe the right things about the incarnation, but that they would feel the wonder of a God who comes close, who works through broken people, and who saves sinners by name.

So teach for both targets this week. Send your students home with a firmer grip on who Jesus is: promised Messiah, virgin-born, God with us, Savior from sin. And send them home softened, marveling that this same Jesus has written people like them into His story, and ready to obey Him even when it costs them something.

Question 1

Student Question:

Matthew's very first sentence calls Jesus "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). What promises had God made to Abraham and to David, and what is Matthew claiming about Jesus by anchoring Him to both of those covenants?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by helping students feel the weight of Matthew's opening line. In the Greek, the phrase translated "the book of the genealogy" echoes the language of Genesis, the book of beginnings. Matthew is signaling that a new creation is dawning. He immediately names two men, David and

Abraham, and the order is deliberate: David first because Jesus is the promised King, then Abraham because the blessing reaches beyond Israel to all nations.

To Abraham, God promised land, descendants, and that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3; 22:18). Paul tells us that the “offspring” of that promise is ultimately Christ (Galatians 3:16). To David, God promised through Nathan that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12–16). Centuries of prophets kept that hope alive even when there was no king on the throne at all. Matthew’s claim is breathtaking: the promises have a name, and the name is Jesus.

Help students see that this is not abstract. By tying Jesus to these covenants, Matthew is teaching that God keeps His word across centuries and through circumstances that look like total failure. The God who finished what He started with Abraham and David is the God who will finish His good work in them as well (Philippians 1:6).

Guard against a subtle error here. Jesus is the King, and His kingdom is real, but it is not the earthly political kingdom many in Israel were hoping for. As the Gospel unfolds, Matthew will show that the throne of David is fulfilled in Christ reigning now at God’s right hand, and that His kingdom is His church, not a future earthly empire. Plant that seed gently here so it is ready when you reach it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, through whom all nations are blessed (Genesis 12:1–3; Galatians 3:16)
- Jesus as the promised son of David and rightful heir of an everlasting throne (2 Samuel 7:12–16; Luke 1:32–33)
- The unity of the Old and New Testaments: the same God keeping the same promises across the whole story of Scripture
- The reign of Christ as King now, at the right hand of God, rather than a future earthly political kingdom (Acts 2:30–36)
- God’s faithfulness to His word as the ground of the Christian’s confidence today

Discussion Prompts

- Which of God’s promises feels hardest for you to believe He will actually keep, and why?
- How does it strengthen your faith to know that Jesus is the climax of a story God had been telling for two thousand years?
- What difference does it make to say that Jesus is reigning as King right now, rather than only someday?

Question 2

Student Question:

The family line of Jesus is full of people with broken and even scandalous stories. When you read your own history honestly, where are you most tempted to believe that your past has disqualified you from being useful to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and the goal is not information but honest reflection. Begin by reading the four women aloud and recalling their stories without flinching. Tamar was wronged by her father-in-law and resorted to desperate deception (Genesis 38). Rahab was a prostitute in pagan Jericho (Joshua 2). Ruth was a Moabite, from a people Israel was taught to keep at arm's length. Bathsheba is named only as "the wife of Uriah," a deliberate reminder of David's adultery and the murder that followed (2 Samuel 11).

Matthew did not have to include any of them. Genealogies of the day usually traced fathers only. He puts these women in on purpose, so that the family tree of the Messiah testifies in advance to the kind of grace Jesus came to bring. The line to Christ runs straight through scandal, failure, and outsiders.

Help your students name, gently and without forcing public confession, the places where they have written themselves off. Many believers carry a quiet conviction that God can use other people but not them, because of something in their past. This passage answers that lie directly. The same God who wove Rahab into the line of the Savior is not embarrassed by their story.

Move the conversation toward grace, not shame. The point is not to dwell on the past but to see that God specializes in redeeming it. Remind them of Paul, who called himself the foremost of sinners and yet was made a minister of the gospel (1 Timothy 1:15–16).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The grace of God that reaches outsiders and sinners, woven into the very lineage of Christ
- The difference between guilt that God has forgiven and shame that the enemy wants us to keep carrying
- God's pattern of using flawed people to accomplish His purposes
- Repentance and forgiveness as the doorway from a broken past into usefulness in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What part of your past have you assumed puts you on the sidelines of God's work?
- How does seeing Rahab and Bathsheba in Jesus' family line change the way you read your own story?
- What would it look like this week to live as someone God has genuinely forgiven?

Question 3

Student Question:

Matthew arranges the generations into three sets of fourteen, and he refuses to skip over the exile to Babylon (1:11, 17). What is he teaching us about how God works through long stretches of waiting, and even through judgment, to keep His promises?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Matthew highlights his careful structure in verse 17: three sets of fourteen generations, from Abraham to David, from David to the exile, and from the exile to the Christ. Scholars note that Matthew is selective, leaving out some names to make the pattern fit, which is perfectly acceptable in ancient genealogies. The point is not arithmetic precision but theological shape. He wants us to see the whole sweep of Israel's history bending toward Jesus.

Notice that he refuses to hide the exile. The deportation to Babylon was the lowest point in Israel's national life, the moment when it seemed God's promises had collapsed. Matthew writes it right into the family tree of the Messiah. He is teaching that God's purposes are not derailed by judgment, by waiting, or by seasons that feel like defeat.

This is deeply pastoral. Your students live much of their lives in the long, ordinary middle, where promises feel slow and prayers feel unanswered. The genealogy assures them that God is at work in the stretches that feel like nothing is happening. The fourteen silent generations were not wasted; they were carrying the promise forward.

You might draw the connection to God's timing in the New Testament: "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4). God is never early and never late. He is faithful in the waiting.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereignty over history, including seasons of judgment and exile
- The faithfulness of God across long periods of apparent silence
- The fullness of time as evidence that God works on His own perfect schedule (Galatians 4:4)
- God's ability to bring redemption out of His people's lowest moments

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life are you currently in a long season of waiting on God?
- How does it help to know that the exile, the worst chapter, was still part of God's plan?
- What practices help you stay faithful when it feels like nothing is happening?

Question 4

Student Question:

Joseph is called "a righteous man" who first plans to protect Mary quietly and then obeys God at real cost to his own reputation (1:19, 24). Where is God asking you to choose obedience over how things will look to other people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joseph is one of the quiet heroes of the Christmas story. Matthew calls him “a righteous man,” and then shows us what that righteousness looked like under pressure. Discovering that Mary was pregnant, and not yet understanding the truth, he faced public humiliation. The law allowed him to expose her. Instead, his first instinct was mercy: he resolved to divorce her quietly, to protect her as much as he could (1:19).

Then the angel reveals the truth, and Joseph’s obedience becomes immediate and costly. He takes Mary as his wife, knowing full well what the neighbors will assume and whisper. He accepts a lifetime of raised eyebrows about the timing of this child. He names the boy Jesus, claiming Him legally as his own son. Every step costs him something in the eyes of his community.

This is where the question presses on your students. Righteousness is not merely believing correct things; it is obeying God when obedience is expensive. Help them locate the specific places where they are tempted to disobey, or to soften God’s call, in order to protect their image. For some it will be a relationship, for others their finances, their honesty at work, or their willingness to be known as a Christian.

Hold up Joseph as a model of quiet, costly faithfulness. He never speaks a recorded word in Scripture. He simply obeys. God often does His deepest work through people who are willing to be misunderstood for His sake.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Biblical righteousness as faith expressed in obedience, not merely correct belief (James 2:17–22)
- The fear of man as a snare, contrasted with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 29:25)
- Obedience that is costly as a mark of genuine faith
- God’s use of humble, faithful people who are willing to be misunderstood

Discussion Prompts

- Where is obedience to God currently costing you something, or where might it soon?
- When are you most tempted to let your reputation override God’s call?
- Who do you know that models quiet, costly faithfulness, and what can you learn from them?

Question 5

Student Question:

The angel says plainly that the child is conceived “from the Holy Spirit” and born of a virgin (1:18, 20, 23). Why is the virgin birth essential to who Jesus is, and what would be lost if it were not true?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the question set, so take your time. Matthew states three times, in different ways, that this conception is not ordinary. Mary “was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (1:18), the angel says “that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (1:20), and Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (1:23). This is not a minor detail; it is essential to the gospel.

Explain why the virgin birth matters. First, it safeguards the deity of Christ. Jesus is not merely a man whom God adopted or empowered; He is the eternal Son who took on flesh. The miraculous conception declares that this child’s origin is in God. Second, it safeguards His full humanity. He was truly born of Mary, truly one of us, not a phantom or a visitor only appearing to be human. Third, it fulfills prophecy, showing again that God keeps His word.

Ask what would be lost without it. If Jesus had two human parents in the ordinary way, He would be merely a remarkable man, and we would still be in our sins, because only God could accomplish our salvation, and only a true human could stand in our place. The virgin birth holds together the two truths the whole gospel rests on: Jesus is fully God and fully man.

You may encounter students who find miracles hard to accept. Be patient and confident. The God who created the universe from nothing is not stretched by forming a child in a virgin’s womb. The real question is not whether God could, but whether we will receive the One He sent.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The virgin birth as essential to the incarnation, not an optional detail (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:34–35)
- The full deity of Christ: the eternal Son taking on flesh (John 1:1, 14)
- The full humanity of Christ: truly born, truly one of us (Hebrews 2:14–17)
- Prophecy fulfilled as evidence of God’s faithfulness and the truth of Scripture
- Why a Savior had to be both God and man to accomplish our salvation

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter for your salvation that Jesus is both fully God and fully man?
- How would you explain the importance of the virgin birth to a friend who thinks it is a minor detail?
- Where do you need to trust that God can do what seems impossible in your own life?

Question 6

Student Question:

The whole story turns on God breaking into ordinary lives: an engaged couple in a small, unremarkable town. Where have you stopped expecting God to show up in the ordinary details of your life, and what would change if you truly believed He is with you there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the wonder of the incarnation toward daily life. The God who came to a small town and an ordinary couple is the God who is present in the ordinary corners of your students' lives, the ones that feel too small or too dull to matter to heaven.

Many believers quietly divide their lives into sacred zones, where they expect God to be present, and ordinary zones, where they do not. The commute, the kitchen sink, the difficult coworker, the long Tuesday. Matthew 1 collapses that division. God chose Nazareth and a carpenter's home. He is Immanuel, God with us, in exactly the places we assume He overlooks.

Encourage students to name a specific ordinary place where they have stopped expecting God. Then ask what would change if they truly believed He was with them there. Often the change is not in the circumstance but in the heart: a new attentiveness, patience, or gratitude.

This is a formation question more than a doctrine question, so resist the urge to lecture. Give people room to be honest about the places that feel God-forsaken, and gently point them back to the promise of His nearness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The nearness of God in Christ, present in the ordinary as well as the dramatic
- The danger of dividing life into sacred and secular zones
- Practicing the presence of God in everyday tasks and relationships
- Gratitude and attentiveness as fruit of believing God is with us

Discussion Prompts

- Which ordinary part of your week feels the most empty of God's presence?
- What would change in that place if you really believed He was with you there?
- What is one habit that could help you notice God in the ordinary?

Question 7**Student Question:**

Matthew says the child will be called "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (1:23). What does it mean that in Jesus God Himself came to be with us, rather than simply sending help from a safe distance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Matthew reaches back to Isaiah 7:14 and lands on the name Immanuel, which he carefully translates for us: "God with us." This is one of the great summary phrases of the whole Bible, and it bookends Matthew's Gospel, which closes with Jesus promising, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:20).

Help students grasp how radical this is. Many religions imagine a god who is far off, who must be appeased or climbed toward. The gospel announces the opposite: God came down. He did not send a memo, a principle, or even only a prophet. He came in person, as one of us, to be with us.

Draw out the difference between help sent from a distance and presence. A wealthy benefactor might mail a check to a struggling family without ever coming near. God did not do that. In Christ He entered the poverty, the temptation, the grief, and finally the death that we know. He is the God who is with us in it, not above it.

This truth is meant to comfort and to anchor. When your students face suffering, loneliness, or fear, the deepest answer the gospel gives is not an explanation but a Person: God with us, who will never leave us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The incarnation as God drawing near, not staying distant (John 1:14)
- Immanuel as a frame for the whole of Matthew's Gospel (1:23; 28:20)
- The contrast between the God of the gospel and a distant, unreachable deity
- The abiding presence of Christ with His people through every trial

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most need to know that God is with you right now?
- How is God being with us different from God sending help from far away?
- How might the promise of Immanuel change the way you face your hardest situation?

Question 8

Student Question:

Both Mary and Joseph were handed a calling that others would misunderstand and gossip about. Who in your life needs you to trust God's quiet work in them rather than the surface story, and how can you show that trust this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Both Mary and Joseph were given callings the world would never understand. Mary would carry a child no one would believe was conceived by the Spirit. Joseph would raise a son everyone

assumed was conceived in scandal. Each had to trust God's hidden work in the other, and in the situation, when the surface story looked like failure or shame.

This question invites students to extend that same trust to people in their own lives. We are quick to read people by their surface story: the struggling teenager, the wayward family member, the difficult coworker, the believer who is growing slowly. God is often doing quiet work beneath what we can see.

Encourage practical, concrete trust. Trusting God's work in another person might mean patience instead of nagging, encouragement instead of criticism, or prayer instead of gossip. Ask students to name one specific person and one specific way they will show that trust this week.

Be careful to keep this from becoming an excuse to ignore genuine sin or danger. Trusting God's work in someone is not the same as pretending nothing is wrong. It is choosing hope and patience where the world chooses judgment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's often-hidden work in the lives of others
- Patience and hope as expressions of love for our neighbor (1 Corinthians 13:4–7)
- The danger of judging by appearances (John 7:24)
- Encouragement and prayer as ways we cooperate with God's work in people

Discussion Prompts

- Who in your life are you tempted to write off by their surface story?
- What is one concrete way you can show trust in God's work in that person this week?
- How can you tell the difference between patient hope and ignoring a real problem?

Question 9

Student Question:

The angel says, "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). What does this name reveal about the central problem Jesus came to solve, and how does the New Testament say a person actually comes to receive that salvation from sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and it deserves the most care. The angel ties the name Jesus directly to His mission: "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). The name itself, a form of Joshua, means the Lord saves. Before Jesus ever preached a sermon or worked a miracle, His name announced what He came to do.

First, draw out the diagnosis hidden in the verse. The central human problem is not merely suffering, poverty, or bad circumstances, real as those are. It is sin. Jesus did not come primarily

to improve our situation but to save us from our sins and to reconcile us to God. Many people today want a Savior from their problems but not from their sins. Help students feel the difference.

Then turn to the question of how a person comes to receive this salvation. Be clear and gracious here, and let Scripture set the pattern. The salvation Jesus accomplished is received as we respond to the gospel: hearing the good news, believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, repenting of our sins, confessing Him as Lord, and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins. On the day the church began, Peter preached Christ crucified and raised, and when his hearers asked what they must do, he answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

Take care to teach this as a living, obedient faith, not as a list of works that earns salvation. We are saved by grace, but grace is received through a faith that obeys (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Mark 16:16). Avoid the popular idea that salvation comes by faith only, apart from repentance, confession, and baptism. Scripture never separates believing in Jesus from obeying Him. The same Lord who saves us from our sins calls us to take up our cross and follow Him in a lifelong walk of faithfulness.

Keep the tone one of wonder, not argument. The astonishing news is that the holy God came in person to rescue rebels like us from the very thing that destroys us. The proper response is not pride in having the right formula but gratitude that bows the knee and gladly obeys.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin, not merely suffering, as the central problem Jesus came to solve
- The meaning of the name Jesus: the Lord saves (1:21)
- Salvation received through hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9–10; Galatians 3:26–27)
- Baptism by immersion for the forgiveness of sins, into Christ and into His body (Romans 6:3–4; Mark 16:16)
- Salvation by grace through an obedient, living faith, not by faith only or by works that earn merit
- Discipleship as a lifelong walk of faithfulness following our salvation

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Jesus came first to save us from our sins, not only from our problems?
- How does the New Testament describe the way a person responds to the gospel and comes to Christ?
- How does remembering that you are saved by grace keep obedience from becoming mere rule-keeping?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole chapter, from the genealogy to the manger. Name one specific way Jesus, the promised Savior who is God with us, is reshaping the way you see your past, your obedience, or your hope this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone question to gather up the whole chapter and press it toward the heart. Matthew 1 has given us four great truths: Jesus is the promised Messiah, He is virgin-born and fully God, He is Immanuel who comes near, and He is the Savior who rescues us from our sins. The aim now is not to add information but to invite transformation.

Encourage students to be specific. Vague resolutions fade by Tuesday. A concrete answer might sound like: "I will stop letting my past silence me, and I will serve in the ministry I have been avoiding," or "I will obey God in this costly relationship even though others will not understand," or "I will look for Christ's presence in my ordinary workday this week."

Let the question land personally. You might give students a moment of silence to write one sentence before sharing. The goal is for each person to leave with a single clear way they are saying yes to the Jesus this chapter reveals.

Close the lesson with worship, not just resolve. The wonder of Matthew 1 is that God did all of this. Our response of obedience flows from gratitude, not anxiety. Lead your class to marvel that the God of Abraham and David came to be with us and to save us by name.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of doctrine and daily transformation
- Specific, concrete obedience as the fruit of genuine encounter with Christ
- Worship and gratitude as the proper motive for Christian obedience
- The lifelong process of being formed into the likeness of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one truth from Matthew 1 that God most wants to work into your heart?
- What specific step will you take this week in response?
- How can this class pray for you as you take that step?