

Son of David, Son of Abraham

Matthew 1–2 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Matthew opens his Gospel by gathering up the whole story of Israel and pointing it at one child. The covenant promises to Abraham and to David converge on Jesus, and his two names announce everything that follows: Jesus tells us what he will do, save his people from their sins, and Emmanuel tells us who he is, God with us.

Catholic Touchstone. The virginal conception and Mary's perpetual virginity. The Church reads Matthew 1–2 as the hinge where Old Covenant promise becomes New Covenant presence, and this session lets the group meet the perpetual virginity question honestly and from the text itself.

What You Need to Know

Matthew's opening words, *biblos geneleos* ("the book of the genealogy"), deliberately echo Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 in the Greek Old Testament. Before a single event is narrated, Matthew is claiming that a new creation, a new Genesis, begins with this child. The genealogy is not throat clearing before the story; it is the first theological statement of the Gospel. It establishes Jesus' legal claim to David's throne through Joseph, his adoptive father. In Jewish practice, a father's acknowledgment of a child has long been understood to establish legal sonship, with its inheritance and dynastic rights, even apart from biological descent. On that understanding the virginal conception does not weaken the royal claim; Joseph's naming of the child (1:25) publicly claims him as his son.

Matthew arranges the names in three sets of fourteen (1:17): from Abraham the story rises to David and kingship, from David it decays into exile, and from exile it waits in silence for the Messiah. The structure preaches. Israel's history is not a random list; it has a shape, and the shape bends toward Christ.

Four women appear before Mary: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah. Each is a Gentile or is bound up with the Gentile world, and each carries a story shadowed by scandal or irregularity. Matthew includes them on purpose. Grace has always run through crooked lines, the nations have always been in view, and the reader is being prepared for the greatest irregularity of all, a virgin with child by the Holy Spirit.

Joseph's justice is revealed in his refusal to expose Mary publicly (1:19). The tradition holds two permissible readings of his interior state: many understand his resolve as mercy toward one he believed guilty, while other Fathers and Doctors, including Origen, St. Bernard, and St. Thomas Aquinas, held that Joseph already perceived the mystery before him and withdrew in humble reverence, judging himself unworthy to take the mother of his Lord into his home. Neither reading is condemned; present the question as open. Either way, his four dreams in these chapters recall the earlier Joseph, the dreamer of Genesis, through whom God brought his family down into Egypt to save it.

Four times in these two chapters Matthew uses his signature formula, that something happened “to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet” (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23), and a fifth Old Testament citation, the chief priests' quotation of Micah (2:5-6), stands alongside them. This fulfillment thread runs the length of the Gospel. Note that fulfillment for Matthew is richer than simple prediction and result; Jesus takes up Israel's whole story, its exodus, its exile, its tears, and relives it faithfully. That is why Hosea 11:1, which in context is about the nation of Israel, can be fulfilled in Jesus. He is the New Israel in person.

The Magi episode sets three postures before us: Herod is threatened by the true King, the chief priests know the correct answer from Micah and never make the short walk to Bethlehem, and pagan stargazers with imperfect knowledge do everything right, they seek, they find, they worship, they give. Matthew's first worshippers of the Jewish Messiah are Gentiles, a quiet overture to the Great Commission.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 22:15–18.** The oath to Abraham: in his seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Matthew 1:1 claims that seed has arrived.
- **2 Samuel 7:12–14.** The promise to David of an everlasting throne for his son. The genealogy is Matthew's legal brief that Jesus holds this claim.
- **Isaiah 7:14.** The Emmanuel sign given to faithless King Ahaz. Matthew 1:23 declares its deepest fulfillment: the virgin's son is God with us in person.
- **Micah 5:2.** Bethlehem, little among the clans of Judah, will produce the ruler of Israel. The chief priests quote it to Herod without ever acting on it.
- **Hosea 11:1.** “Out of Egypt I called my son.” In Hosea this is Israel at the Exodus; in Matthew 2:15 it is Jesus, the New Israel, recapitulating his people's story.
- **Jeremiah 31:15.** Rachel weeping for her children. Matthew draws it from the very chapter that promises the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), so even this citation of grief secretly carries hope.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

Chrysostom marvels that the evangelist hides none of the sins of Jesus' ancestors, naming the scandals of Tamar and of David openly. The Physician of souls, he says, was not ashamed of the family he entered; he came precisely to heal the wounded line, and the honesty of the genealogy is itself good news for sinners who fear their past disqualifies them.

Voices of the Church: St. Jerome (Against Helvidius)

Answering the claim that Matthew 1:25 implies Mary later had other children, Jerome shows from Scripture's own usage that “until” marks a point of emphasis without asserting anything about what follows it, and that “brothers” in the biblical idiom regularly means kinsmen. He defends Mary's perpetual virginity as the constant faith of the Church, not a later sentiment.

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermons on the Epiphany)

Leo sees in the Magi the firstfruits of the nations, our own ancestors in faith walking ahead of us to Bethlehem. In their three gifts the whole mystery of Christ is already confessed: gold for the King, incense for God, and myrrh for the Man who would die and be buried.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 430.** The name Jesus means “God saves”; the name expresses both his identity and his mission, exactly as the angel explains in Matthew 1:21.
- **CCC 496–497.** The Church has always confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin; the Gospel accounts, including Matthew 1:18–25, present this as a divine work beyond human understanding.
- **CCC 500.** The “brothers” of Jesus named in the Gospel are close relations, not other children of Mary; Matthew himself identifies James and Joseph as sons of another Mary (Matthew 27:56).
- **CCC 528.** The Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God, and Savior of the world; in the Magi the pagan nations discover him and represent the beginning of the Gospel’s reach to all peoples.

Thread Watch

- **The Emmanuel thread (plant).** Matthew 1:23 names Jesus “God with us.” Watch across the study for presence language, for where and how Jesus promises to remain with his people. This thread resolves in the final session.
- **The fulfillment thread (plant).** Five Old Testament citations appear in these two chapters alone, four of them carrying Matthew’s fulfillment formula. Invite the group to keep an informal count as the study proceeds and to notice what kinds of Scripture Jesus fulfills.
- **The Son of David thread (plant).** Track who calls Jesus “Son of David” in this Gospel and what they ask of him. The pattern will matter when he enters Jerusalem.
- **Sealed guess (plant).** At the end of this session each participant writes and seals a guess on Take-Home Sheet 1: “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” It is not discussed tonight. It opens in Session 8 at Caesarea Philippi.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain why Matthew opens with a genealogy and what the titles “son of David” and “son of Abraham” each claim.
2. Participants discover the Abrahamic and Davidic promises in the Old Testament for themselves and connect them to Matthew 1:1.
3. Participants can articulate the meaning of the two names, Jesus and Emmanuel, and begin watching the Emmanuel thread.

4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of Matthew 1:25 and can answer it honestly from Scripture and the Church's constant faith.

5. Participants contrast the Magi, Herod, and the chief priests as three postures toward Christ, and each writes and seals the study's opening guess.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Sealed guess 5 min · Send and Live It 10 min · Prayer 5 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on the number fourteen (saves about 5 minutes), then use only the first Win question (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the steelman chain or the sealed guess; both carry weight for later sessions.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 1 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Son of David, Son of Abraham

Matthew 1–2 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, before we knew you, you knew us. You wrote your promises into history one generation at a time until, in the fullness of time, you gave us your Son. Open the Scriptures to us tonight, and open us to the Scriptures. Let us find Jesus where you have always placed him, at the center of the whole story, and finding him, let us worship like the Magi and not merely know like the scribes. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Share a story your family tells about where you come from. What does that story say about who you are?
2. When has someone's simple presence, just being with you, made more difference than anything they could have said or done?

Build (55 minutes)

The First Verse of the New Testament

1. Have someone read Matthew 1:1 aloud, slowly. What three titles or identifiers does Matthew give Jesus in this one verse? Why might he choose to lead with exactly these?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One), son of David, son of Abraham. Matthew leads with a legal and theological claim before any narrative. His Greek opening, *biblos geneseos*, echoes the wording of Genesis, signaling that a new creation begins here. The genealogy that follows establishes Jesus' royal claim to David's throne through Joseph, his legal father.

2. **Live discovery.** Split into two groups. Group one finds God's oath to Abraham in Genesis 22:15–18. Group two finds God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12–14. Each group reports: what exactly did God promise, and what would it take for both promises to come true in one person?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

To Abraham: that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. To David: a son whose throne would be established forever. Matthew 1:1 claims both lines of promise converge on Jesus. The rest of the Gospel unpacks both, a royal Messiah for Israel whose kingdom reaches every nation, which is exactly where Matthew will end.

A Genealogy with a Shape

3. Read Matthew 1:17. How does Matthew organize the names? What are the two hinge points he chooses, and what does the shape of the list say about Israel's story?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Three sets of fourteen generations, hinged at David and at the exile. The story rises from Abraham to kingship, collapses from kingship into exile, and then waits. The genealogy preaches: history has a direction, and its direction is Christ.

Dig Deeper: Why Fourteen?

In Hebrew, letters carry number values, and the letters of David's name add up to fourteen. Many commentators, ancient and modern, hear Matthew signing David's name over the whole list three times. Matthew never says this explicitly, so hold it lightly, but it fits how carefully this Gospel is built.

4. Look at the women Matthew names before Mary: Tamar (1:3), Rahab and Ruth (1:5), and the wife of Uriah (1:6). What do these four have in common, and why would Matthew include them in the Messiah's family tree?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Each is a Gentile or is bound up with the Gentile world, and each story carries irregularity or scandal that a tidy official genealogy would omit. Matthew includes them deliberately. God's grace has always worked through crooked lines and unexpected outsiders, the nations were always in view, and the reader is being prepared for the most unexpected mother of all, a virgin with child by the Holy Spirit.

Two Names, One Child

5. Read Matthew 1:18–25. What crisis does Joseph face, and how does the angel resolve it? Then look at the two names given to the child in this passage. **Live discovery:** have someone find the prophecy Matthew quotes in verse 23 in its original home, Isaiah 7:14. What does each name announce?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Joseph, a just man, resolves to end the betrothal quietly rather than expose Mary; the angel reveals that the child is conceived by the Holy Spirit. The name Jesus (“the Lord saves”) announces his mission: he will save his people from their sins, a claim only God can make good on. The name Emmanuel announces his identity: God with us. Isaiah spoke the sign to faithless King Ahaz seven centuries earlier; Matthew declares its fullest meaning has arrived in person.

Build Then Press: Did Mary Have Other Children?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Verse 25 says Joseph “knew her not until she had borne a son.” In plain modern English, “until”

suggests that afterward the marriage was ordinary. Later, in Matthew 13:55, the townspeople name James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas as Jesus' brothers. Put those together and many sincere, Bible-loving Protestants conclude that Mary and Joseph had other children, and they reach that conclusion from the text, not from any desire to dishonor Mary. Let the group feel the force of this reading before answering it.

6. Now press on the reading from Scripture itself. Does “until” in the Bible assert what happens after the limit it names? **Live discovery:** have someone read Matthew 28:20 and someone else read 2 Samuel 6:23. Then ask: in biblical usage, who can “brothers” include? Check Genesis 13:8 and 14:14, where the RSV2CE calls Lot, Abraham's nephew, his “kinsman”; the Hebrew word in both verses is *ach*, the ordinary word for brother, which the translators render “kinsman” precisely because the biblical word is broader than blood sibling. Finally, compare Matthew 13:55 with Matthew 27:56, then 27:61 and 28:1. Whose sons are James and Joseph?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Biblical “until” (*heos hou* in Greek) affirms something up to a point without claiming reversal after it. Jesus is with us “to the close of the age,” and certainly not absent afterward; Michal had no child “to the day of her death,” and obviously none after. Matthew 1:25 asserts the virginal conception, that Joseph had no part in this child, and asserts nothing beyond it.

Likewise *adelphoi* in the biblical idiom covers kinsmen broadly, as with Lot, whom the Hebrew text literally calls Abram's brother. And Matthew quietly gives us a key himself: the James and Joseph of 13:55 appear at the cross in 27:56 as sons of a Mary whom Matthew does not call the mother of Jesus, and whom he then twice names simply “the other Mary” (27:61; 28:1). Reading these verses together, the Church has always identified her as a different Mary (CCC 500). The honest conclusion: Scripture does not settle this question in isolation with the clarity some imagine, which is precisely why the witness of the apostolic Church matters. This is not a stalemate; it is how the Bible was always meant to be read. From the earliest centuries, in East and West alike, the Church confessed Mary ever-virgin, and St. Jerome answered this exact objection in the fourth century. We are not correcting the Bible; we are reading it with the family that wrote it down, and that family has never read it Helvidius' way.

Three Postures Before the King

7. Read Matthew 2:1–12. **Live discovery:** the chief priests answer Herod with a prophecy; have someone find and read it in Micah 5:2. Now name the three responses to the newborn King in this scene. What separates the Magi from the scribes?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Herod is threatened and schemes. The chief priests and scribes know the right answer, chapter and verse, and never make the five-mile walk to Bethlehem. Pagan stargazers with imperfect knowledge do everything right: they seek, they find, they fall down and worship, they give. Knowing about Christ is not the same as coming to him. In their gifts the Church has long seen a confession: gold for a king, frankincense for God, myrrh for a man born to die.

8. Read Matthew 2:13–23. Live discovery: Matthew says the flight to Egypt fulfills a prophet; have someone find Hosea 11:1 and read the surrounding verses. In Hosea, who is “my son” called out of Egypt? What is Matthew claiming by applying those words to Jesus?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Hosea, the son called out of Egypt is Israel at the Exodus. Matthew is claiming that Jesus is the New Israel in person, taking up his people's whole story and living it faithfully where Israel failed: down into Egypt, up through the water, into the wilderness, and onto a mountain to give God's teaching, all of which the group will watch unfold in the next sessions. Even the citation of Rachel weeping comes from Jeremiah 31, the very chapter that promises the New Covenant, so the tears themselves carry hope.

Sealed Guess (5 minutes)

Hand out Take-Home Sheet 1. Ask each person to find the My Guess box and write, privately and without discussion: “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” Then fold that section closed and write their name on the outside. Collect nothing; they keep it. Tell them only this: the question comes from a scene later in this Gospel, and the box opens when we reach it.

Send (10 minutes)

1. Matthew names real, flawed people in Jesus' family line and hides nothing. Where do you need to believe that God can work through the crooked lines of your own story?
2. The Magi moved; the scribes stayed home with the right answer. What is one concrete step toward Christ that you have known about for a while and not yet taken?

Live It This Week

- Each morning, pray the Holy Name slowly, “Jesus, save me from my sins,” and let the name mean what the angel said it means.
- Read Matthew 1–2 once more on your own, marking every place Matthew quotes the Old Testament. Bring your count next week.
- Practice Emmanuel: give someone the gift of unhurried presence this week, a visit, a call, a meal, with your phone out of reach.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Son of the living God: you did not stay distant from our history, you entered it. Be Emmanuel for us this week, God with us in our homes, our work, and our waiting. Give us the feet of the Magi and not the seats of the scribes, and bring us back together to open your word again. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 1:23 (RSV2CE): *“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel” (which means, God with us).*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 1 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

Son of David, Son of Abraham · Matthew 1–2

Primary Text

• Matthew 1:1 · Matthew 1:3, 5, 6 · Matthew 1:17 · Matthew 1:18–25 · Matthew 1:23 · Matthew 2:1–12 · Matthew 2:13–23

Live Discovery Passages

• Genesis 22:15–18 (oath to Abraham) · 2 Samuel 7:12–14 (promise to David) · Isaiah 7:14 (Emmanuel sign) · Micah 5:2 (Bethlehem) · Hosea 11:1 (out of Egypt) · Matthew 28:20 and 2 Samuel 6:23 (biblical “until”) · Genesis 13:8 and 14:14 (kinsmen as “brothers”) · Matthew 13:55 with Matthew 27:56, 61 and 28:1 (the other Mary)

Background Passages

• Genesis 2:4; 5:1 (book of the genealogy) · Jeremiah 31:15 and 31:31 (Rachel's weeping and the New Covenant)

Catechism

• CCC 430 · CCC 496–497 · CCC 500 · CCC 528

Memory Verse

• Matthew 1:23