

He Is Risen: The Great Commission

Matthew 28 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover every remaining thread resolving in twenty verses: the sign of Jonah cashed on the third day, Daniel 7 fulfilled in “all authority in heaven and on earth,” Abraham’s promise kept in “all nations,” the Jordan’s Trinity spoken over every future baptism, and the Gospel’s last sentence answering its first chapter: the child named God-with-us says, I am with you always, to the close of the age. The study ends where it began, with their own guesses in their hands, and the title of the whole journey finally explained.

Catholic Touchstone. The missionary mandate of the Church, baptism in the Trinitarian name, the historical credibility of the resurrection, and the abiding presence of Christ in his Church, above all in the Eucharist, until the close of the age.

What You Need to Know

Matthew’s resurrection account is compact and mighty. The two Marys come to see the tomb; an earthquake, an angel like lightning who rolls the stone away and sits on it, guards frozen like dead men, and the announcement on which the world turns: He is not here; for he has risen, AS HE SAID. That last phrase quietly cashes the study’s oldest unpaid note: the sign of Jonah, three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, promised in chapter 12, planted in Session 6, now paid in full. The angel’s commission to the women, and then the risen Lord’s own greeting to them on the road, makes women the first witnesses and first evangelists of the resurrection, a detail no ancient inventor would have chosen, since a woman’s testimony carried little legal weight in that world. The improbable detail is a fingerprint of honesty.

Matthew alone records the guard and the bribe (28:11–15): the soldiers report everything, the chief priests pay them to say the disciples stole the body while we slept, and Matthew notes the story was still circulating when he wrote. Tonight’s build-then-press works this scene as the study’s closing apologetic, because the oldest objection to the resurrection concedes the decisive fact: the tomb was empty. Nobody bribes soldiers to explain away a body that is still there. The stolen-body story must also explain sleeping guards who somehow witnessed the theft, disciples who all fled at the arrest (26:56) and a leader who denied him before a servant girl (26:69–75), men who then staked their lives on a proclamation they would have known was a lie, and a movement that exploded in the very city where the tomb could be checked. Men die for false beliefs sincerely held; men do not die for what they know they invented, and this preaching did cost lives: James’s within a decade (Acts 12:2), and Peter’s and Paul’s by the testimony of the first generation (1 Clement 5).

The finale on the Galilee mountain (28:16–20) is the Gospel’s whole architecture completing itself, and the leader’s job tonight is mostly to stay out of the way while the group watches it happen. “They worshiped him; but some doubted”: Matthew’s honesty to the last, and comfort for every honest

doubter since; the risen Lord commissions that mixed group anyway. Then the four alls. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me: Daniel 7:13-14, discovered in Session 12, its coming-on-the-clouds language taken up on oath at the trial in Session 13 alongside Psalm 110:1, is hereby announced as fulfilled; the Son of man has come to the Ancient of Days and received the everlasting dominion, and the mountain in Galilee is the readers' view of the enthronement. Make disciples of all nations: Genesis 22, discovered in Session 1, the oath to Abraham that in his seed all nations would be blessed, now becomes the Church's standing orders; the genealogy's "son of Abraham" was a promissory note and this is its payment. Baptizing them in the name (singular, one name, three persons) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: the Trinity manifest at the Jordan in Session 2 is now spoken over every baptism until the end of time, and the group that learned why Jesus stood in the water now hears what he was filling it with. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you: the Sermon's hearing-and-doing, the discourse's watchfulness, the judgment's mercy: the whole moral architecture of the Gospel handed to the Church as curriculum.

And then the last sentence. And behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age. Have the group physically turn back to Matthew 1:23 and read the two verses aloud, back to back: his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us... and behold, I am with you always. The Gospel is a single arch, and its keystone is presence: announced in a name, manifest at the Jordan, claimed over the temple, promised to the two or three, hidden in the least of these, uncurtained at the cross, and now spoken as the risen Lord's final, standing promise. This is the moment to reveal that the study's title was the Gospel's master key all along, and to name where that presence lives now: in the Church he built on the rock, in the least he told us to serve, and above all on the altar, where the four verbs sound until he comes. The final guess ceremony then closes the circle: both versions of their answer, read side by side, become each participant's own written record of what a Gospel can do to a person in fourteen weeks.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Jonah 1:17 with Matthew 12:39–40.** Three days in the heart of the earth: the only sign promised, now given. He has risen, as he said.
- **Daniel 7:13–14.** All authority, all peoples, an everlasting dominion: the enthronement seen in vision, invoked on oath at the trial, announced as accomplished on the mountain, reread live tonight.
- **Genesis 22:15–18.** The oath that through Abraham's descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed, as the apostles quote it (Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8): Session 1's discovery becomes Session 14's marching orders, reread live tonight.
- **Isaiah 7:14 with Matthew 1:23.** Emmanuel, God with us: the name that opened the Gospel, answered by its last sentence.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Athanasius (On the Incarnation)

Athanasius argues that the surest proof of the resurrection is its ongoing effect: death, once mankind's tyrant, is now trampled and mocked by Christians, even children and young women, who face it without fear. A dead man works no such change; the Savior who despoiled death is alive and active, and the courage of the martyrs is his daily demonstration.

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

On the final promise, Chrysostom insists that “I am with you always” was not spoken to the apostles alone, for they would not remain until the close of the age: the Lord speaks to the whole body of the faithful in every generation, one Church across the centuries, accompanied by her Head until the end.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Easter Sermons)

Augustine preaches that the resurrection of Christ is the distinctive faith of Christians: that he died, even the pagans believe; that he rose, this is the Church's own treasure and the hinge of everything. We are Easter people, and our faith stands or falls with the empty tomb.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 641–644.** The women were the first messengers of Christ's resurrection, sent to the apostles themselves; even confronted with the risen Lord, some disciples doubted, which shows the resurrection faith was born, under grace, from direct experience of the reality, not from credulity.
- **CCC 645 and 656.** The risen Jesus is not a ghost or a resuscitated corpse but the same Jesus in a glorified body; the resurrection is a real event with historically verified manifestations, and at the same time transcends history as the entrance of Christ's humanity into God's glory.
- **CCC 849–850.** The missionary mandate: the Church, sent by God to the nations, by the command of the Lord in Matthew 28:19–20, exists to evangelize; the mission has its origin in the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit into whose communion the baptized are drawn.

Thread Watch: Final Accounting

- **Sign of Jonah: PAID.** “As he said.” Let the group name it.
- **Son of man / Daniel 7: FULFILLED.** All authority in heaven and on earth. Reread Daniel 7:13–14 live and let the recognition land.
- **Son of Abraham / all nations: FULFILLED.** Reread Genesis 22:15–18 live: Session 1 returns as marching orders.
- **Baptism and Trinity: FULFILLED.** The Jordan's manifestation becomes the Church's formula.
- **Doing-the-word: HANDED ON.** Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
- **Emmanuel: RESOLVED.** Matthew 1:23 and 28:20 read aloud back to back. Then, and only then, explain the study's title. Fulfillment count: invite final tallies of the formula citations; most readers count between ten and fourteen depending on criteria, and the group's number is theirs to defend.
- **Final guess ceremony.** Both versions read privately side by side; volunteers share what changed. Close by asking each person to answer Jesus' question aloud, one sentence each, around the circle: “Who do you say that I am?”

Session Goals

1. Participants can present the resurrection's historical credibility from Matthew's own guard-and-bribe scene.
2. Participants witness Daniel 7 and Genesis 22 fulfilled in the commission, using their own prior discoveries.
3. Participants read 1:23 and 28:20 back to back and can articulate the Emmanuel arch of the whole Gospel.
4. Participants complete the final guess ceremony and each confess, in one sentence, who they say Jesus is.
5. Participants name where the promised presence lives now: the Church, the least, and the Eucharist, and choose their next step after the study.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 10 min · Build 50 min · Final guess ceremony 15 min · Send and Live It 8 min · Closing prayer 7 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: compress Build question 1 to the announcement and “as he said” (saves about 5 minutes), then shorten the bribe scene press to its central point, nobody bribes soldiers about a body still in the tomb (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the Daniel 7 and Genesis 22 rereadings, the 1:23 with 28:20 reading, or the final ceremony.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 14 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

He Is Risen: The Great Commission

Matthew 28 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, fourteen weeks ago we opened this Gospel at a genealogy and a name: Emmanuel, God with us. Tonight we stand at an empty tomb and a mountain in Galilee. Let us hear the last sentence of this Gospel the way the first disciples heard it, and send us from this table the way you sent them from that mountain. Through the risen Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (10 minutes)

1. What is the best news you have ever received, and what did you do in the first sixty seconds after hearing it?
2. Looking back across these fourteen weeks: which single session or discovery has stayed with you most?

Build (50 minutes)

As He Said

1. Read Matthew 28:1–10. Catalog everything unexpected in this scene: who comes, what they find, who speaks, and who is sent to tell the apostles. Then the angel's phrase: "he has risen, AS HE SAID." What old promissory note from this study does that phrase cash? And why is it historically significant that women are the first witnesses?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

An earthquake, an angel like lightning sitting on the rolled-away stone, guards frozen like dead men, and the announcement: he is not here; he has risen, as he said. "As he said" pays the study's oldest note: the sign of Jonah, three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the only sign that generation was promised, now given. And the first witnesses, first believers, and first evangelists of the resurrection are women, whose testimony carried little weight in that world's courts: no inventor building a persuasive story would have chosen them, which is precisely why their presence rings true. The risen Lord himself meets them on the road, and they take hold of his feet, flesh and bone, not phantom, and worship him.

Build Then Press: The Oldest Objection

2. Read Matthew 28:11–15 before the press.

The Oldest Objection, Given at Full Strength

The alternative explanation is as old as the first Easter and Matthew records it himself: the disciples came by night and stole the body while the guards slept. A skeptic can put it strongly: the

witnesses were interested parties; the appearances were reported by believers; grief produces visions; and a stolen body plus devoted preaching explains Christianity without a miracle. This is the objection every generation retells in new vocabulary, and Christians owe it a serious answer rather than a dismissal. Let it stand.

3. Now press on the scene Matthew reports. What did the chief priests NOT say to the soldiers, and what does the bribe therefore concede? Walk the stolen-body story through its own details: sleeping witnesses, the

disciples we watched flee in chapter 26, the city where the preaching began, and the deaths the preachers died. What can that story not explain?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Notice what the authorities never say: “the body is right here.” Producing the corpse would have ended the movement in an afternoon; instead they purchase an explanation for its absence, which concedes the one fact everything turns on: the tomb was empty, and both sides knew it. The story they buy refutes itself: sleeping guards cannot testify to what happened while they slept. It must then explain how the men who all fled at the arrest, and whose leader crumbled at a servant girl’s question, found the nerve to rob a guarded tomb, and why they proclaimed the resurrection first in Jerusalem, the one city where the claim could be checked against the tomb, and why they kept proclaiming it under threat of death, a course that cost James his life within a decade (Acts 12:2) and, by the testimony of the Church’s first generation, Peter’s as well. Men suffer and die sincerely for false beliefs; men do not do so for what they know they invented, and the thieves of the theory would have known. Add St. Athanasius’ living evidence: death itself has been mocked by Christians ever since, which is not the effect of a corpse. “Some doubted” even on the mountain (28:17), and the Lord commissioned them anyway: honest doubt has a place at this table, and always has. What it must reckon with is an empty tomb both sides conceded and lives no lie has ever produced.

The Four Alls

4. Live discovery, the study’s last two. Read Matthew 28:16–20. Then send two finders back to passages this group has already discovered: one rereads Daniel 7:13–14 (Session 12), the other rereads Genesis 22:15–18 (Session 1, our first discovery). Read each aloud, then read the commission again. What is Jesus announcing with “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”? And whose ancient promise becomes the Church’s marching orders in “all nations”?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Daniel saw one like a son of man come to the Ancient of Days and receive dominion, glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. On the mountain, Jesus announces the vision accomplished: all authority in heaven and on earth HAS BEEN GIVEN to me. The trial claim of last week is the enthronement fact of this week; the mountain in Galilee is our view of Daniel 7 fulfilled.

And Genesis 22, the first passage this group ever discovered: the oath that through Abraham’s descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (Leader note: the RSV2CE renders the verse

as the nations blessing themselves by his descendants; Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:8 show the apostles receiving it as the nations blessed in Abraham's offspring, which is the reading fulfilled in the commission.) Fourteen weeks ago we found the promise; tonight it becomes standing orders: go therefore and make disciples of ALL NATIONS. The genealogy's "son of Abraham" was a promissory note, and the Great Commission is its payment. Baptizing them in the NAME, singular, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: the Trinity we watched manifest over the Jordan is now spoken over every baptism until the end of time. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded: the Sermon, the discourses, the mercy of the judgment scene, the whole curriculum handed to the Church. Four alls: all authority, all nations, all commands, and one more coming in the final sentence.

The Last Sentence and the First Name

5. Now the study's final act of discovery. One reader finds Matthew 1:23 and stands ready. Another has 28:20. Read them aloud, back to back, slowly: first the name, then the promise. Then answer together: what is this whole Gospel about, in one word? And where does that presence live NOW?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

"His name shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us." ... "And behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age." The Gospel is a single arch from name to promise, and its keystone is presence: announced at the conception, manifest at the Jordan, claimed over the temple (something greater is here), promised to the two or three, hidden in the least of these, uncurtained at the cross from top to bottom, and now spoken by the risen Lord as his standing, final word. There is no "Ascension departure" in Matthew, and that is the point of how he ends: the Gospel closes not with a goodbye but with a presence that never leaves. This is why our study bears the name it does: Emmanuel was never just Session 1's memory verse; it was the master key to the whole Gospel of Matthew.

And where does that presence live now? Exactly where this Gospel put it: in the Church he built on the rock and promised to accompany, against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail; in the least of these, where the King waits in disguise; and above all on the altar, where the four verbs sound at every Mass and "this is my body" keeps the last sentence literally: I am with you always. The tabernacle lamp in your parish is Matthew 28:20 burning in real time.

The Final Guess Ceremony (15 minutes)

Leader, take this slowly. Everyone takes out both versions of their answer: the sealed Session 1 original and the Session 8 rewrite. Read them privately, side by side. Then invite volunteers: what changed between your two answers, and what changed it? Receive everything without correction. Then, to close the circle the way Caesarea Philippi opened it, go around the room and let each person answer Jesus' own question aloud, in one sentence, present tense: "Who do you say that I am?" The leader answers last.

Send (8 minutes)

1. The commission is not advice; it is standing orders addressed to the baptized, including the doubting. Who is your “all nations”: the person or place your discipleship has been avoiding?
2. What is your next step when this study ends: another book of Scripture, a ministry, an hour before the tabernacle? Name it to one person in this room before you leave.

Live It This Week and Beyond

- Visit the Blessed Sacrament once this week and pray Matthew 28:20 there: the promise, kept, in the room with you.
- Tell one person outside this group one thing you found in this Gospel. The commission begins at that size.
- Keep both versions of your guess inside your Bible at Matthew 16. Read them again in a year.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Son of the living God: Emmanuel. You have been with us in this word for fourteen weeks, and you will be with us always, to the close of the age. All authority in heaven and on earth is yours: send us, then, as you sent the eleven, worshiping and still learning, to make disciples, beginning with ourselves. Stay with us, Lord, on the altar, in the least, and in your Church, until we see you face to face. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 28:20b (RSV2CE): “...and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

EMMANUEL · SESSION 14 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

He Is Risen: The Great Commission · Matthew 28

Primary Text

- Matthew 28:1–10 · Matthew 28:11–15 · Matthew 28:16–20

Live Discovery Passages

- Daniel 7:13–14 (reread: all authority) · Genesis 22:15–18 (reread: all nations) · Matthew 1:23 with Matthew 28:20 (the arch, read back to back)

Background Passages

- Matthew 12:39–40 with Jonah 1:17 (the sign, cashed) · Matthew 26:56, 69–75 (the flight and the denials) · Matthew 3:16–17 (the Jordan Trinity)

Catechism

- CCC 641–644 · CCC 645, 656 · CCC 849–850

Memory Verse

- Matthew 28:20b

Do Not Forget

- Final ceremony order: both guess versions read privately, volunteers share, then around the circle aloud: “Who do you say that I am?” Leader answers last. Reveal the title's meaning only after 1:23 and 28:20 are read back to back.