

Matthew 1:1-25 – Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham
Gospel reading for the Christmas Vigil mass

Scripture as inspired and inerrant.

Catholics and reading the scriptures:

- 1) The content and unity of the whole scriptures,
- 2) Read within the living Tradition of the whole Church
- 3) Paying special attention to the “analogy of the faith.”

Senses of Scripture:

- 1) Literal – what is the human author trying to convey?
- 2) Allegorical – points to the mystery of Christ
- 3) Moral
- 4) Anagogical – points to our eternal destiny

The Infancy Narratives:

- 1) Curiosity about the saviors origins – the who and the how of Jesus’ birth
- 2) As vehicles of the writers’ theology

Matthew:

- 1) Traditionally attributed to the Apostle Matthew (Levi)
- 2) Written originally in Hebrew or Aramaic for a largely Jewish audience probably around 50 AD.
- 3) Later (70 AD?) translated to Greek – the version we have now.
- 4) Particularly interested in showing Jesus the Messiah as firmly rooted in the history of the people of Israel. Also a concern to show any gentile readers that Christ is the Lord of ALL.

Chapter 1:1-17 – The Genealogy of Jesus Christ (Son of DAVID)

- This cannot be read as a narrative, a biography, a poem, etc. A genealogy is a specific kind of literary form, well attested in the OT (1 Chron. 1-9 is basically all genealogy). The ancient near east was very ethno-centric, so genealogies established a person in their tribe/family. To be a member of the People of God gave a specific importance to genealogies. It put one in line with the Chosen People. Priestly lines also were traced this way. So genealogies had **familial, legal, and religious purposes**.
- What is the purpose of Matthew’s genealogy? V.1 tells us: to root Jesus Christ firmly in the line of David and Abraham. Jesus is rooted directly within the history of the Chosen People, the people of Israel.

V.1 – “genealogy” = Gk. *Genesis*. Recalls the Greek OT Gen 2:4 and 5:1.

“Christ” = Greek for Anointed One, or Messiah – the title for Jesus throughout the Gospel of Matthew.

“son of David” – why? Because in 2 Sam. 7:16, the Lord promised David “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne

shall be established forever.” And in v. 14, the king was called the son of God. This will become important in the next section when Matthew focuses on Jesus as Son of God. But since the Babylonian exile in 586/587 BC, there had been no Davidic King. The promised Messiah was expected to reign on the throne of David. Hence Matthew’s concern with tracing Jesus, through Joseph, to David. “son of Abraham” – why? Gen 17:6: “And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.” So, a royal significance. Also, gentiles can find their blessing through Jesus’ link to Abraham: Gen. 22:18 “and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves.”

Then, the genealogy traces salvation history from Abraham to Jesus:

v. 2-6 the pre-kingdom period

v. 6-11 the period of the Kingdom

v. 12-16 exile and post-exile (Babylonian exile)

v.2: The Patriarchs; “Judah and his brothers” – the twelve tribes of Israel; again, Jesus is fully rooted in all of Israel; the mention of the tribes here may also be an early allusion to the Twelve Apostles.

v.3-6: The material for this section is drawn largely from 1 Chron. 2:1-15 and Ruth 4:18-22. The general pattern for the whole Matthew genealogy comes from Ruth 4:18-22.

v.4: From Ram to Nahshon is the time in Egyptian slavery (Num 2:3 pictures Nahshon as a leader of Judah as they wander in the wilderness.)

v.6-11: Drawn largely from 1 Chron. 3:5; 10-17. This is the time of the united and divided kingdom of Israel.

v. 6: With David, the normal pattern is broken by using his title “the king.” This will link him in verse 16, when Jesus is noted as the one “who is called Christ.”

v.12: The time of the exile. This information is drawn from Ezra 3:2,8 and other places. Zerubbabel was active in about 520-515 BC rebuilding the Temple after the return from the Babylonian exile. Zerubbabel is the last figure in the genealogy for which we have OT evidence. The origins of Abidun to Joseph are unknown (v. 13-16).

v.16: Again breaks the normal pattern. Joseph is not said to be the father of Jesus, but the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born. This will anticipate what is to come: the virginal conception of Jesus of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, like David in v.6, is given a title: the Christ.

In Hebrew law, Jesus would gain FULL rights as Joseph’s son. He truly descended from David through an adopted father. It is sometimes speculated that Mary was also from the line of David since marriages were often kept within the same clan. But in any case, Matthew goes to great lengths to show that Jesus is TRULY the Son of David through his adoption by Joseph. We will see shortly signs of Joseph’s true adoptive paternity.

- Who is Joseph’s father? Mt. 1:16 tells us it was Jacob. Lk 3:23 tells us it was Heli. St. Augustine told us that it would not be uncommon to have two genealogies: one from a biological Father, one from an

adoptive Father. Remember, and adoptive father passes on ALL legal rights, even genealogy. Augustine suggests that Matthew gives us the line through Joseph's natural father, and Luke through his adoptive father.

v.17: "Fourteen generations" 3x 14. Why?

- Divided into three main parts in which the rulers were 1) judges, 2) kings, 3) priests. Jesus, in the new era, rules over his people as judge, king, and priest, and fulfills all these perfectly.
- 6x7; seven was the number of perfection. Jesus would thus being the seventh generation. That is, Jesus is coming at God's perfectly appointed time in the history of His people.
- 14 shows Jesus as the new Davidic king. The numerical value of David's name in Hebrew is 14 (D=4, V=6, D=4).

The Four Women of the Genealogy

- Tamar in v. 3 (c.f. Gen. 38); Rahab in v. 5 (c.f. Josh 2:1); Ruth in v. 5 (c.f. Book of Ruth); "The Wife of Uriah" in v. 6 (c.f. 2 Sam 11:2-5)

It is not unheard of to include women in ancient genealogies, but in this case it does break the pattern modeled after the book of Ruth (4:18-22). Why did Matthew choose to include these four women? Many *theories* have been adduced:

- They have *gentile* roots (Canaanite, Moabite, Hittite). This could anticipate the universal nature of Jesus' mission already present in his bloodline.
- All but Ruth are associated with sexual immorality. Could hint at a defense against allegations regarding Jesus' "irregular" birth. If these women did not disqualify Solomon as king, neither could Jesus have similar allegations against Him.
- They took an initiative and played an integral role in God's plan even in less than savory ways. At the very least, these women are unexpected tools of God's work. It prepares us 1) to expect God to use unexpected means in His plan, and 2) for THE woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary in His plan.

Matthew 1:18-25: The Birth of Jesus the Messiah (Son of GOD)

Moving from a genealogy, now we come to a very closely related narrative story of the birth of Christ. If Matthew's goal in the first part was to show Jesus as Son of David through Joseph, here he attempts to show Jesus as Son of God through the Holy Spirit.

That Jesus is Son of God is "placed" in different points, or stressed from different angles by different Biblical writers:

- At His Resurrection: "...and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4)
- At his Baptism: "...and a voice came from Heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'" (Mark 1:11).
- At his conception: as seen in Matthew 1:18-25
- From all eternity (pre-existence): John 1:1 ff. and Phil 2:6-11

In Matthew, the Divine sonship is strongly affirmed by the fact that Jesus has no human father, is born of a virgin, and is born of the Holy Spirit *even though* Joseph plays such a large role in this narrative. If 1-17 are the WHO of Jesus, 18-25 is the HOW.

v. 18: “the *birth* of Jesus Christ” – same word “*genesis*” from v.1 shows that the genealogy and this narrative are very closely related.

“betrothed” – we have no modern parallel. Mary and Joseph were not merely engaged. Mary was not an unwed mother; notice v. 20&24 call Mary Joseph’s wife. Betrothal was a specific ceremony that had legal consequences. It was a temporary period (up to one year) between the covenant of marriage itself (formal exchange of consent) and the time when spouses lived together. Since they were legally married, this could only be terminated by a bill of divorce (See Deut 24:1-4).

“with child of the Holy Spirit” - is Matthew telling us that Mary was found to be with child...and letting *us* know it was of the Holy Spirit, or was it Joseph who found she was of child with the Holy Spirit? The answer will help us understand Joseph’s actions.

v. 19: “just man” or “righteous man”

“put her to shame” – to expose her? “to exhibit”

“send her away quietly” – since they were betrothed, any extramarital activity would be considered adultery. He could seek a divorce according to Deut 24:1-4. But Deut. 22:23-24 lays out the penalty for adultery (for a betrothed virgin and the man): stoning to death. Why did Joseph want to send her away quietly?

- 1) He had reverence for the law as a righteous man who saw a case for divorce according to Deut 24. But he wished to avoid bringing Mary to public trial according to Deut 22. But how does ignoring this aspect of the law make him just?
- 2) The Reverence Theory. Joseph *knew* that Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit (see v. 18). He considered himself unworthy to participate in God’s magnificent work. To put Mary away quietly is therefore to keep the mystery within her secret. If this is the case, the angel in v. 20 directs Joseph to put aside his pious fears that would take hi away from God’s vocation for him.

v. 20: Joseph is likened to the patriarch Joseph in Genesis: They share the same name, they both have fathers named Jacob; God spoke to both through dreams.

The angel calls Joseph “Son of David,” perhaps to again remind the reader of the Davidic line of Jesus, perhaps to enlighten Joseph as to why *his* role in Jesus’ paternity is so critical.

v. 21: “Jesus” – the Hebrew equivalent of “Yahweh saves.” This is a name, an identity, and a mission. Notice that Jesus is greater than the original Joshua (Hebrew of Jesus) who led the people in to the promised land; Jesus leads His people into the real homeland of Heaven. Jesus is greater than David saved the people from national enemies; Jesus saved His people “from their sins.”

v.22: The first of *several* “fulfillment formulas” in Matthew. Matthew connects Jesus many times to specific prophesies of the Old Testament in an attempt to show his Jewish audience that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

v.23: This reference is from the Greek translation of Isaiah 7:14. The Hebrew original of Isaiah probably is more correctly rendered “young woman,” but when about 100 years before Christ the OT was translated into Greek, the term virgin was chosen (*parthenos*).

- Historically, Isaiah was writing during the time of the Syro-Ephramite war of 734 BC. At this time, Israel and Judah constituted separated kingdoms. Pekah, the king of Israel had allied with the king of Syria against the local superpower, Assyria.
- (The wicked) King Ahaz of Judah refused to join the revolt. Israel and Syria turned on Ahaz and surrounded Jerusalem and planned to put a vassal on the throne of Judah.
- To save himself, Ahaz planned to appeal for aid to Assyria. Sure, Assyria would destroy Judah's enemies, but would also reduce Judah to vassalage.
- The prophet Isaiah knew this and appealed to Ahaz to put his trust not in foreign kings but IN THE LORD.
- Isaiah told the king that he could expect a sign: that of Isaiah 7:14. A child would be born of a young woman (probably a member of the king's harem), who would be a Davidic prince who would deliver Judah from its enemies.
- Ancient Jewish interpretation identified the child of Is. 7:14 as Hezekiah, Ahaz's son and successor, one of the truly religious monarchs of the House of David.

The early Christians knew of this prophesy in its Greek form: a virgin shall conceive. Having already a faith in the known fact of the virginal conception of Jesus, they quickly saw in this passage a *fuller sense* that referred to the birth of Christ by the Virgin Mary. v. 23: Emmanuel – not so much a name as an identity. This could be a reference to the Incarnation: in Jesus Christ, God is truly with us. This fits well with one of Jesus' closing comments in Mt. 28:20: "behold I am with you always, to the close of the age." It could be "his people" from v. 21 that will call Him by this title.

v. 25: "until" – in English this often means that *after* the until, the situation changes: "I will not eat *until* the pizza is delivered." This is not necessarily the case with biblical usage. It stressed primarily that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary BEFORE she bore a son. This again stressed that there is no question of the virginal conception of Jesus. It says nothing of what happened after. For instance, see Jn 9:18: "The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man..." or 1 Tim 3:13: "Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching."

The Church is constant in her teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary.

v. 25: "he called his name Jesus" – this, along with taking Mary into his home, show Joseph's role in the paternity of Jesus as adoptive Father, thus giving Jesus the legal standing as an heir of king David.

Next time, Matthew chapter 2: The Visit of the Magi and the Flight to Egypt