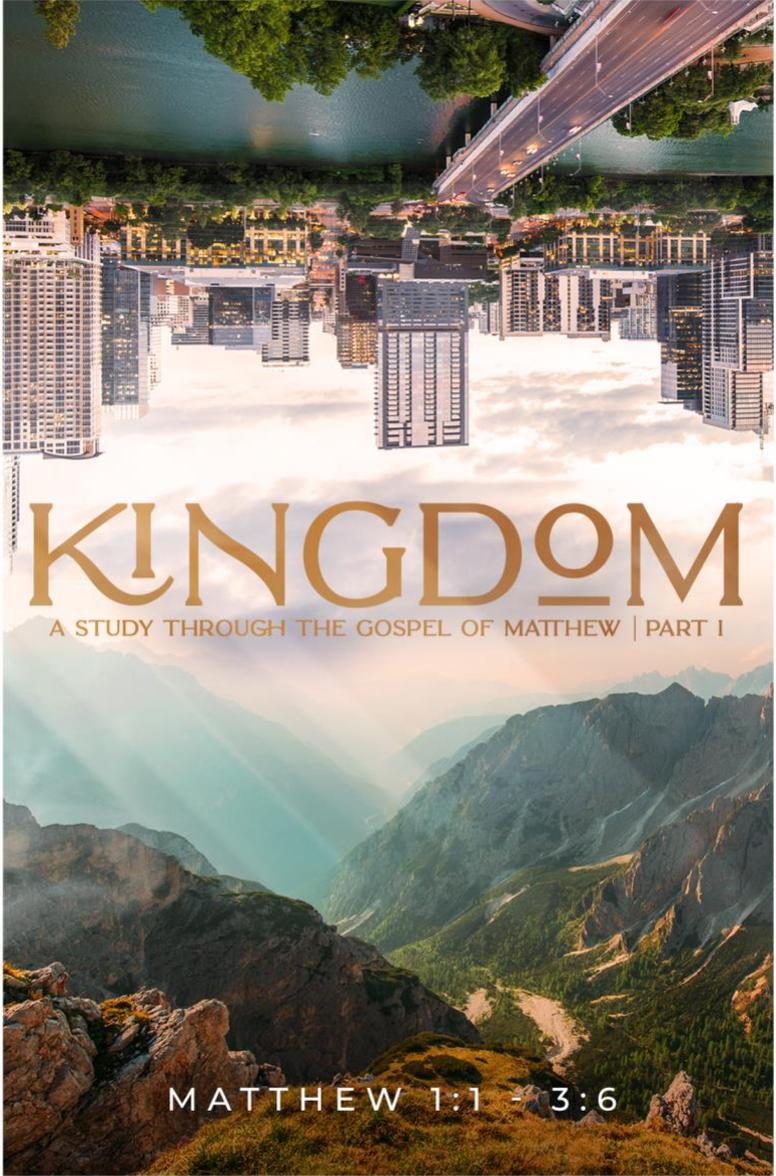




WORD TO LIFE

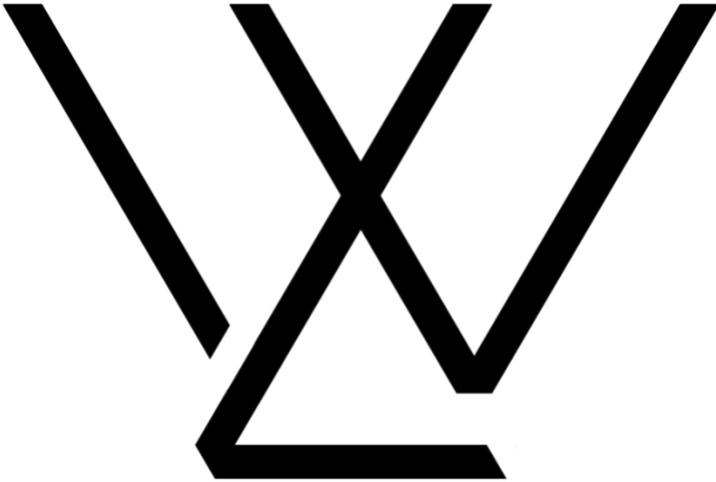
WEEKS 1 - 5



KINGDOM

A STUDY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW | PART I

MATTHEW 1:1 - 3:6



Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

Contributors

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Week 1: Matthew 1:1-17

Day 2: An Overview of the Gospels

READ: Matthew 1:1-17

EXPLORE:

The Protestant Bible contains 66 different writings that can be categorized into six distinct genres: law, history, wisdom/poetry, prophecy, letters, and the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the writers of the four gospels which tell about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These are more than just ordinary biographies, and each Gospel (big G) tells the gospel (little g) message: that through Jesus we can be reconciled to God. This is indeed good news!

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the 'Synoptic Gospels' because of their similarity; however, each human author had their own perspective and purpose while writing which gives us readers a unique insight into God's all-encompassing redemptive plan. Each writer stressed the importance of facts that most strongly attested to their purpose in writing. This explains why there are differences (not discrepancies) in some of the shared stories across the gospel accounts.

The Gospel of Mark is believed to be the earliest writing and Matthew and Luke followed (dating approximately A.D. 63-69). Most likely, Matthew and Luke used Mark's writings as an outline, but added more detail through the oral testimony of other eyewitnesses.

Matthew was one of the 12 apostles called by Jesus. He was a Jewish tax collector but left everything to follow Jesus around during His earthly ministry. This gave Matthew the unique advantage of personally witnessing the teachings and workings of Jesus first-hand. His writings reference the Old Testament more than any of the other gospels. Matthew focuses on Jesus being the long-awaited King and he takes great care to show how the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah point to Jesus. His goal was to show his fellow Jewish people that Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets.

Mark and Luke were not apostles, but rather later followers. It is thought that Mark got his material from the apostle Peter and Luke got his material from eyewitnesses and the apostle Paul. The Gospel of Mark focuses on Jesus being a suffering servant as his primary audience was persecuted believers, and The Gospel of Luke describes Jesus as the Savior for all mankind and not just the Jews.

John was an apostle of Jesus, and in fact, the only one not to die a martyr's death according to church history. He was exiled to the Island of Patmos and penned the Book of Revelation. The Gospel of John seeks to establish Jesus as God and was written many years after the Synoptics.

So why do we need four accounts of the same story? Well, historically, these four gospels were written for different communities in response to their different needs showing the universality of the gospel message. Apologetically, the multiple accounts support the veracity of these stories. Theologically, we get a fuller picture of Jesus with having four narrative records. God used authors with different personalities and backgrounds to accomplish His purposes, just as He still does today.

BIG IDEA: The gospels are different people giving different perspectives about the same stories regarding the same God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Have you ever been troubled by apparent discrepancies among the stories of Jesus?
- **Challenge:** As you begin to read stories in The Gospel of Matthew, turn to the other accounts to fill in details and perspective that may be missing.

Week 1: Matthew 1:1-17

Day 3: Lessons from Lineage

READ: Matthew 1:1-17

EXPLORE:

If you were to write a book about your family what would the title be? What details would you include? Every family has moments that they're proud of. Equally, every family has events that they would strike from the pages of history if they could. Although this week's passage is "just a list of names," it includes unlikely people that many might have been tempted to slide under the historical rug.

Abraham, a man of great faith, made his share of mistakes. He slept with his servant in order to have a child.¹ Two different times, he said his wife was his sister so that kings would marry her and spare his life.² His son Isaac would do something similar with his own wife.³ Isaac's son, Jacob, deceived his father and stole his brother's blessing and inheritance.⁴ Jacob had 12 sons by four different women.⁵ One of them was named Judah. Judah's first two sons were so evil that God killed them. Judah refused to care for his son's childless widow, Tamar. Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and tricked her father-in-law into getting her pregnant.⁶ We are only four names into this genealogy...

Rahab ran a brothel in Jericho. When Israel defeated Jericho, she was saved because she provided help to Israelite spies.⁷ Ruth was from the nation of Moab.⁸ Remember Lot, Abraham's nephew? The people of Moab came from Lot's daughter after she got her dad drunk and slept with him.⁹ King David had a faithful and honorable soldier in his army

¹ See Genesis 16 for reference.

² See Genesis 12 and 20 for reference.

³ See Genesis 26:6-12 for reference.

⁴ See Genesis 27 for reference.

⁵ See Genesis 29:31-30:24 for reference.

⁶ See Genesis 38 for reference.

⁷ See Joshua 2 and 6 for reference.

⁸ See Ruth for reference.

⁹ See Genesis 19:30-38 for reference.

named Uriah. While Uriah was at war, David stole his wife, slept with her, got her pregnant, then had Uriah killed.¹⁰

Do you get the picture? The family tree of Jesus, the King of kings, is filled with people who made big mistakes. Why would God allow this? Furthermore, why would God highlight these details instead of conveniently skipping over them? Here are two reasons we must not ignore. First, the Gospel is for everyone! It is not relegated to people who have behaved well or come from a specific place. Second, God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect will.

Do you struggle with mistakes you've made in the past? This lineage proclaims the truth that, not only did the Savior come through the lineage of imperfect people just like you, He came for imperfect people just like you. Jesus came to give you a new future, regardless of your past. If God isn't hung up on your past, you shouldn't be either.

BIG IDEA: Biblical genealogies give important context to history, lineage, and God's redemption story.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What part of your past do you struggle with? Have you accepted the forgiveness Christ made possible on the cross?

- **Activity:** Using the footnotes, take some time to read about the men and women mentioned in this lineage. Why do you think so many Gentile people are woven into the family line of the Messiah?

¹⁰ See 2 Samuel 11 for reference.

Week 1: Matthew 1:1-17

Day 4: Jesus, Son of David: King of the Jews

READ: Matthew 1:1-17 and 2:23, Micah 5:2, Revelation 19:16

EXPLORE:

Today, we will explore the theme of Jesus as King from the Scriptures which support this very crucial subject. Matthew, being a very Jewish writer, finds it important that we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophesied Son of David, King of the Jews. Since our space here is limited, let's get right to a few important texts. Matthew begins his account with the genealogical proof that Jesus, in His humanity, was directly descended from Abraham and David through his legal father Joseph. Luke traces Jesus' lineage to David through Mary, his mother. Jesus is a descendant of David by blood through His mother Mary, and through legal adoption, through his father Joseph. Romans 1:3 reads, "*As to His earthly life, Christ Jesus was a descendant of David.*"

Matthew's gospel is careful to record the presenting of Christ as King, in a birth like no other can boast of. His genealogy declares Him to be the long awaited and promised Son of David and His virgin birth supports Him as the Son of God. The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with examples of how Jesus is the promised one who was to come.¹¹ Galatians 3:16 declares without question that the Seed of Abraham is Christ. This is the same promised coming Seed spoken of in Genesis 3:15, who would *crush the head of the Serpent*. The title "Son of David" is a Messianic title and the devout people of Jesus' day knew the biblical allusion meant He was being proclaimed as the long-awaited Deliverer whom the Scriptures had promised. This title which was rightly bestowed upon Jesus was a designation of great honor. As the Son of David, He is David's Lord, and greater than David. It is hard to do justice to the gravity of the claim that Matthew is making in only the first few verses of his Gospel account.

¹¹ See Psalm 89:12-28, 2 Samuel 7:12-16, and Isaiah 9:6-7 for reference.

Week 1: Matthew 1:1-17

Day 5: The Ancestry of Christ

READ TOGETHER: Genesis 12:3, 22:18, 2 Samuel 7:12, Isaiah 9:6-7

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

My (Sabino) wife and I recently did a 23andMe. 23andMe is DNA genetic testing for ancestry and other information. Perhaps your family has also done an ancestry study. Ancestry compilation and studies are common to virtually everyone. We are all fascinated with who we came from and what we can learn about ourselves. Matthew 1 gives us the most important ancestry in the history of the world. As Christians, we should be fascinated with Christ's ancestry since we have been adopted into it!

Christ's ancestry is important because it gives proof or evidence to His title as Messiah. The Old Testament is replete with Messianic promises like the virgin birth and it is imperative that the New Testament records their fulfillment. There are three main sections in Jesus' genealogy, and they concern Abraham, David, and the exiles in Babylon. We will briefly speak on all three.

Abraham is one of the most significant figures in all of Scripture. He is significant because of the great Messianic promises that God made to him. God promised that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This is seen even in the genealogy

recorded here. Both Rahab and Ruth were gentiles who were grafted into the people of God and blessed. Most of us reading this WTL are Gentiles and fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham thousands of years ago.

David is referenced as a king at the end of Abraham's section. This is important because Jesus would most often be referenced in the gospels as the Son of David. Jesus fulfills the promise of dominion that God gave to David and his descendants. In the kingly line of David there is a mixture of righteous and wicked kings. This teaches us that grace does not pass down through blood but only by God's gracious choice.

The final section traces the families following the deportation to Babylon. This is a great testimony to God's preserving grace. The Jews ancestry record was not lost in captivity like many other nations that came before them. God preserved the Jews in Babylon and after because of the promise He made concerning the Messiah. Those of us who are Christians are also being preserved and one day we will see our names written in the Book of Life, the ancestry of Jesus Christ!

BIG IDEA: Christ's ancestry is the most important one in human history and we are now included in it.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Share with the group the person outside of Christ that you find most interesting in Jesus' genealogy and why.
- **Activity:** Describe what it means to you to be a part of the family of God.

Week 2: Matthew 1:18-25

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 1:18-25

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Matthew includes Jesus' birth in the opening sections. Which of the following Gospel accounts also include a telling of Jesus' birth?
 - Mark-

 - Luke-

 - John-

- **Question:** In contrast to Luke's particular focus on Mary, Matthew brings particular focus to Joseph. What impression do you have of Joseph after reading vv. 18-25?

- **Activity and Question:** Summarize the angel's message to Joseph in your own words. What do you notice about the angelic message?

- **Question:** The idea of God being “with us” is an incredibly significant theme throughout Scripture. Using a concordance or your own knowledge of Scripture, what are some other references to God being “with/amongst humanity?”

- **Activity:** The Nicene Creed is a statement of faith established by the early Christian church. Read the excerpt from the Creed below and write down how you see Matthew 1 and other gospel accounts supporting this statement.
 - *“And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man...”*

Week 2: Matthew 1:18-25

Day 2: The Naming of Jesus

READ: Matthew 1:18-25 and Isaiah 7

EXPLORE:

Names are incredibly significant in Scripture. In the Jewish world, names were not just markers to identify someone, they were often hope-filled symbols from one generation to the next. Similar to the angelic message given to Mary,¹³ Matthew also details the instructions given to Joseph about the naming of the one who would be called Jesus. We read, *“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.’”*¹⁴ The naming of the promised Messiah who was called Jesus introduces us to two major themes that are established throughout Matthew’s Gospel. We will work to briefly detail those implications in today’s study.

First, the naming of Jesus introduces us to the prophetic promise of salvation. Specifically, Jesus’ name reflects the word used in the Old Testament for an Israelite leader named Joshua (*Yeshua* or *Yehoshua*) which means “God saves.”¹⁵ Matthew will continue to expound how Jesus came to bring not a political deliverance, but a spiritual saving in fulfillment of what had been promised centuries before.

Second, the naming of Jesus announces a familiar theme which is repeated throughout the Scriptures of God dwelling with His

¹³ See Luke 1:31 for reference.

¹⁴ See Matthew 1:21-23 for reference.

¹⁵ Our study of Matthew’s Gospel Account will consistently show Jesus as the fulfillment of what had been promised (e.g. Isaiah) and modeled (e.g. Joshua) in the Hebrew Scriptures.

people. Centuries prior to the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah had foretold the birth of Jesus. We will see as we continue to study Matthew's Gospel account that the nearness of God made visible in Jesus Himself is a theme made visible in His naming, His ministry, and His final instructions.¹⁶ The church council in Chalcedon which occurred 451 AD has given us a trustworthy definition of how to understand the fact that the eternal Son of God took on human flesh in the incarnation. The Chalcedonian Creed says that in the one person of Christ are perfectly united the divine nature and a human nature, and that this union is without confusion, mixture, separation, or division, each nature retaining its own attributes.¹⁷

As we continue to study Matthew's Gospel account, we will have the continual blessing of seeing the two themes we've discussed today put on display in the person and work of Jesus. He is the One who has come to save people from sin and He is the God who has come to be with us!

BIG IDEA: The naming of Jesus is incredibly significant.

APPLY:

- **Summarize:** Using what has been discussed today and your study of Scripture, describe how the terms Yeshua and Immanuel are connected in the life of Christ.

¹⁶ Literally and literarily, Matthew reminds us that Jesus is God who has come near in the beginning, middle, and end of His earthly life. See Matthew 1:21-23, 18:20, and 28:20 for reference.

¹⁷ The theological term which is used to describe Jesus' human and divine nature dwelling together is called hypostatic union.

Week 2: Matthew 1:18-25

Day 3: Immaculate Conception – Fertility, Family, and Folly

READ: Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:26-38; Isaiah 7:14

EXPLORE:

One of the many interesting facets of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the Immaculate Conception, otherwise known as, the Virgin Birth. The notion that Mary got pregnant without a human father is troubling to some; however, the means in which God chose to enter into His creation was both beautifully intimate and uniquely humbling. Both tell us something about our God.

I (Cean) used to work as an embryologist/andrologist in various fertility clinics helping couples to get pregnant using various medical techniques. Therefore, I have always been particularly interested in this unique conception story. Personal experience in the lab has taught me that just bringing together the male and female gametes never guarantees fertilization or the development of an embryo. It is the sovereign hand from above that decrees life and death. Luke's account of this event described the Holy Spirit 'coming upon' and 'overshadowing' Mary. The words he used were a throwback to the creation story when the Holy Spirit 'hovered' over the face of the deep.¹⁸ The intentional comparison conveyed God's direct involvement and the uniqueness of this particular creation.

Did the second person of the trinity have to be born from a virgin? No. However, the unusual means in which He came into the world attested to His divine nature and revealed His human nature. This dual capacity makes Jesus the perfect link between heaven and earth, between God and man. You see, if Jesus is not God, we are

¹⁸ See Genesis 1:2 for reference.

not saved.¹⁹ We need God to break into our disfunction and fix it from the inside because we cannot do it ourselves. Yet, the humanity of Jesus allows Him to sympathize with us and it also shows us a holy way of life here on earth.

So, I am part of a blended family and my husband and I know the challenges and the joys of raising kids that are not our own flesh and blood. It has brought me great comfort over the years to know that my righteous and holy Lord Jesus knows what it is like being in a non-traditional family. This is just another aspect that reveals the tender compassion Jesus has for the brokenness of mankind. I can't help to marvel at the humility, obedience, and trust Mary and Joseph exhibited; however, I would be remiss if I did not warn against the slippery slope that can lead to the veneration of Mary. Yes, she was chosen to have the honor and privilege to carry baby Jesus, but her response was one of a willing servant.²⁰ We would do well to emulate and not elevate her example. It is God alone that deserves all glory and honor and praise. Jesus willingly removed His robes of glory to don the rags of man knowing that it was the best way to reconcile humanity to Himself and reestablish the created order.

BIG IDEA: The virgin birth beautifully balances Jesus being fully God and fully man.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What does the incarnation (enfleshment) of Jesus tell you about the character of God? Do you struggle with the virgin birth? Why or why not?
- **Question:** What brokenness are you experiencing that Jesus cannot relate to?

¹⁹ See I Corinthians 15:14 for reference.

²⁰ See Luke 1:38 for reference.

Week 2: Matthew 1:18-25

Day 4: Joseph's Role

READ: Matthew 1:18-25

EXPLORE:

At first glance the key subjects of this week's verses would appear to be Mary and the Holy Spirit leading up to the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. However, spending a few minutes looking at Joseph's role in this process is worthwhile. Joseph does fulfill a crucial role as the genealogical link to King David as it was prophesied. Read what the prophet Jeremiah communicated centuries before Christ. *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'"*²¹

Interestingly, in these early verses of Matthew, Joseph's humble obedience is on display even though no words from him are recorded. His virtue is put on display not in his words necessarily, but in his actions lived in conformity to a message from the Lord!

This obedience is even more astounding when we take a quick look at some historical context. The formal Jewish marriage process was much more involved than what we are accustomed to today. Joseph and Mary's betrothal was a yearlong process in full view of the family and community. Among other things, it was designed to demonstrate the purity of Mary. Her pregnancy during the betrothal would have been a scandal and it would have subjected Joseph and Mary to public embarrassment and more. Divorce would have seemed like the only reasonable solution for

²¹ See Jeremiah 23:5-6 for reference.

Joseph. A quiet divorce to save Mary some embarrassment and disgrace was his plan prior to the first of four messages Joseph received concerning this matter. In this first dream Joseph was informed that Mary's pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit and that she would give birth to a son to be named Jesus. In accordance with this miraculous reality, Joseph was instructed to take her home as his wife.

After his dream, Joseph immediately moved forward in obedience to the Lord's plan despite the almost certain public scandal to come as the violation of the normal betrothal process and the pregnancy of Mary became known. It's hard to imagine the whispers, glances, snickers, and outright derogatory comments that they would ensue. It seems from the first dream forward Joseph's actions are unquestionably obedient and unselfish.

BIG IDEA: Although not a word from Joseph is recorded in the bible, his humble obedience sets a strong example.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Have you encountered a situation where certain embarrassment and ridicule would be the result of doing the proper thing? If so, how did you handle it?
- **Activity:** Reading about obedience without actually moving into the practice of obedience often serves to expand the gap between knowledge and life-change. Make a list below of how your life needs to be specifically brought into obedient conformity to God's design. Pray that God would burden your heart for what burdens His.

Week 2: Matthew 1:18-25

Day 5: Joseph's Godly Response

READ TOGETHER: Psalm 139:13-16, Deuteronomy 22:33-34, Galatians 4:4, 1 Corinthians 15:47

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Now that it has been proved that Jesus is the son of Abraham and the son of David, Matthew tells us how His birth took place and the events surrounding it. Jesus is the son of Mary but not the son of Joseph. How is Jesus the son of Abraham and the son of David but not the son of Joseph? Jesus does come from the line of Joseph, the Davidic line, but the genealogy makes it clear that Jesus is not the son of Joseph. This is to preserve and make clear that Jesus is the Son of God. He is indeed the seed of a woman but not the seed of a man.

It was not until Mary was betrothed to Joseph that she was found to be with a child from the Holy Spirit. A betrothal was a contractual agreement or promise of future marriage. God deemed it fit that Mary needed a spouse and was not to be a single mother. Joseph would be a great support for Mary as she carried the blessed child. Mary would have a just or righteous man in the upbringing of the Son of God.

Originally Joseph assumed that Mary had been unfaithful to her betrothal agreement. We can only imagine how greatly troubled

he was trying to figure out the appropriate next steps. But God was gracious to him and an angel of the Lord visited him in a dream with instructions. The angel began his address to Joseph by referring to him as the son of David. This would have been a clue to Joseph that this was a Messianic message. The angel said that Mary had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by another man. There was no adultery on the part of Mary. Joseph now knew that he would have no ordinary child and that this child would be the hope of all people.

Joseph obeyed the instructions of the angel. Once a godly man knows the will of God he does not hesitate to accomplish it. He took his wife and was not afraid. He named Mary's son Jesus just as the angel commanded. Far from being sad that the child was not his, Joseph embraced the great honor and dignity of being so closely associated with Jesus.

BIG IDEA: Joseph redirected his life according to the plan of God.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Do you think Mary shared with Joseph before the dream that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

- **Activity:** Imagine what it would be like to raise the Son of God. Name some parenting musts that you would implement if it were you.

- **Questions:** How did the wise men know that Jesus was born and later locate him with Mary? What was their response when they found Jesus? What do you notice about the details of the story?

- **Question:** We read the phrase “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” Have you ever had the experience of rejoicing exceedingly with great joy before? If so, what scenario comes to mind?

- **Question:** How were the wise men able to avoid helping Herod in his sinister plot against Jesus?

Week 3: Matthew 2:1-12

Day 2: The Magi of Matthew and the Shepherds of Luke

READ: Matthew 2:1-12 and Luke 2:8-20

EXPLORE:

In the gospels of Matthew and Luke we are presented with two different groups that receive the news of the birth of Christ. In Matthew we are given the story of the wise men or magi and in Luke we are told of a group of Jewish Shepherds near Bethlehem. The groups are very different in their relationship to God, the way they receive the message, and the knowledge they receive.

The magi were a group of Hellenistic astrologers that came from the East. They were pagans and, according to Matthew, they were some of the first people to receive the knowledge of the birth of Christ. There is some speculation on exactly what the sign they saw was, but based on the reaction of the people of Jerusalem we can draw the conclusion that the sign was subtle, as it was only the Magi that observed its significance. Their faith in the sign brought them to Jerusalem, to question the people, asking, *“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”*

God gave them a sign that was specific to them, and they reacted to find this king and pay homage to him. As they were pagan, however, it is doubtful that they would have been able to see the full significance of the birth of the Messiah. Their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh fulfilled Old Testament prophecy despite their incomplete knowledge of the significance related to Jesus’ birth.

The story of the Magi can be contrasted with the story of the shepherds told in Luke 2. The shepherds were local to the region and, unlike the Magi, they did not come far from the East. The sign that the shepherds were given was that they would find a

baby in swaddling cloths lying in a manger. They received this sign through an Angel of the Lord. The shepherds were also given the knowledge that the baby was the Savior or promised Messiah.

These passages provide an excellent example of how God meets people where they are to achieve His purposes. The magi were pagans from the far east and they were given knowledge of the birth of Christ through specific means that only they perceived. In contrast, the Jewish shepherds were nearer to Christ both spiritually and geographically and they received a message tailor made for them.

These scriptural examples provide an excellent example for us. The message of Christ's birth was told to far off pagan astrologers and it was communicated to lowly nearby shepherds watching their flocks. Just as the birth of Christ was conveyed to those near and far, the message of Christ can be delivered widely today also.

BIG IDEA: The announcement of Jesus' birth was communicated to a wide variety of people and the same should be true today.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How should these two passages encourage us to share the good news about Jesus with others?
- **Questions:** How did you receive the message of the gospel in your own testimony? Do you identify more with the shepherds, the magi, or neither?

Week 3: Matthew 2:1-12

Day 3: Herod or Jesus, King of the Jews?

READ: Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 19:41-44; Luke 19:28-44

EXPLORE:

Who is Jesus and what caused a powerful ruler to fear that his throne would be in danger? Why would a dominant leader fret over a little child? Was he concerned about rumors? Did he hear about prophetic hopes? These questions and more ominously fill the background as the early life of Jesus was violently disrupted. In Matthew 2 we read about how the sinister ruler named Herod wanted to destroy the child and we are left wondering, “Why?”

The answer is relatively simple, but we need to do a little bit of background first. In the days in which Jesus was born, Herod was designated as the so-called “King of the Jews.” It makes sense then that when the child was born and wise men came wondering about the newborn “King of the Jews” disruption was bound to follow. Interestingly, historical records attest to the fact that Herod paid for the restructuring of the temple, but he was sinfully unwilling to give up His kingdom to the true and promised king.

Herod wanted to kill the competition, but the incarnate Christ was way out of his league.

Herod claimed the title of “King of the Jews,” but the Gospel Accounts are not unclear about who that designation truly belongs to. On seventeen different occasions, the title “King of

the Jews” is used throughout the Gospel Accounts.²² Each of the four writers are not shy about rightly ascribing kingship to Jesus.

Although we see Jesus’ association with the King of Jews early in Matthew, we will see it again! The next time Matthew will use the designation “King of the Jews” is in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.²³ Jesus was and is the true and everlasting king and His kingdom runs in stark contrast to the rule of Herod. Herod ought to have led better, but he did not. The people ought to have been attentive to the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, but they were not. The power of sin and death worked to stop what Christ came to accomplish, but they could not.

Big Idea: The kingship of Jesus is starkly contrasted with the kingship of Herod. We will see this expanded throughout Matthew.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Simeon, a righteous and devout man, knowing by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord, recognized the significance of Jesus when Mary and Joseph brought the child into the temple. How are you preparing your heart to embrace Jesus as the reigning King?

²² See Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John for consistent references to “King of the Jews.”

²³ See Matthew 27:11, 29 for reference.

Week 3: Matthew 2:1-12

Day 4: Exceedingly Joyful Worship: A Wise Approach

READ: Matthew 2:10-12

EXPLORE:

Today we have the highly anticipated season finale of the wise men's journey. The once-in-a-lifetime adventure, led by a heavenly GPS (Guiding-star Positioning System), that culminates with the instinctive response to experiencing overwhelming joy—worship.

Similarly, each of us who have been saved by God's grace are intended to travel a continual, worshipful journey. Instead of following a star, we *turn our eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.*²⁴ These aren't just lyrics, but a profound truth that can transform the way we live our lives.

When your face is turned toward Jesus, your focus shifts from yourself to the source of your peace. There is a noticeable difference with people who are happy in the Lord. Charles Spurgeon noticed that worshippers "are not apt either to give offense or to take offense. Their minds are so sweetly occupied with higher things, that they are not easily distracted by the little troubles which naturally arise". This isn't about mustering up some hollow, surface-level optimism, but embracing the ups and down with a deep knowledge that this life is not about *your* comfort, *your* happiness, or *your* legacy. This life is about your Lord. This was the joy that overwhelmed the wise men upon seeing Jesus. Limited as their full knowledge might have been, this was what led them to fall to their knees in worship.

²⁴ See the hymn titled "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" for reference.

If you're anything like me (Brent) when the term "worship" comes up, your mind starts to think of powerful songs the Lord has used throughout your life. While music does play a large role, we risk undermining the true depth of worship if we narrow it down to chords and lyrics. Most words in Scripture translated as "worship" mean to kneel or lay face down in an act of reverence. This is exactly what we see with the wise men. Overwhelmed with joy, they fall to their knees and they offer gifts to this newborn king. Worship is not a static Sunday morning routine but an unfolding, daily pursuit. The wise men didn't "arrive" upon seeing the star. They pursued and pressed on. They didn't settle for the light of the star when they had the chance to see the Light of the World. In that same way, our worship is a life-long journey guided by the reward of beholding the radiant face of our King. We too, upon reaching our destination, will have the same response: overwhelmed with joy, we will fall to our knees and join in with every tribe, tongue, and nation, casting our crowns and gifts before the Savior and Redeemer of the world forever singing "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive all glory and honor and power!"

BIG IDEA: Worship is an everyday response to the overwhelming joy we have in the Lord.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What steps are you taking in your daily life to pursue God in worship? How do you prepare for worship at LifeGroup or church?
- **Question:** The act of giving gifts by the wise men serves as a reminder of the tangible and intangible offerings we present in our worship—our time, talents, and treasures become offerings of the Lord. What gifts can you present to the Lord in your worship?

Week 3: Matthew 2:1-12

Day 5: The Wise Men Visit

READ TOGETHER: Numbers 24:17, John 7:42, Revelation 22:16

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Jesus' birth was relatively quiet for the Savior of the world. He was born into obscurity and disregard. This is a sign of his humiliation. He was no celebrity. He was able to live comfortably and quietly in Bethlehem, the city of David. Taylor Swift would have far exceeded Him in terms of popularity. But God's ways are mysterious and humble.

There are three wise men that come from the East to visit Him. The real mystery is that there are not hundreds and thousands of visitors that come to visit him. Where are the visitors from the north, south, and west? The wise men come to Jerusalem because that is the mother-city of the Jews. In their mind surely the most important city would know about their newborn king. But to their surprise, not only does Herod not know where the child is, but no one does.

Herod finds out from the chief priests and scribes that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. This was news to both Herod and the wise men. The sad reality is that only the wise men choose to travel to Bethlehem to worship the Messiah. None of the religious leaders, nobility, or servants of the court

accompany the wise men in their travels. Christ came to his own and his own did not receive him.

God guided the wise men to Jesus by a star. They knew what city they needed to go to, but they did not know what house they needed to stop in. God set the star above Mary and Joseph's house and when they saw it, they greatly rejoiced. God had made their trip successful. When they saw the child, they fell down and worshiped Him. These Gentile men from the East understood that soon Christ would be their king.

How did they know? Well God had spoken to them in a language (the star) they best understood. They took a special star in the sky over Judea meant that a special king was born there. How sad that Herod nor any of the religious leaders understood the significance of this star like the wise men did. This was a sign from heaven. They were rejecting a message from heaven. This goes to show that sometimes those who are the farthest away from God become true worshippers while those who are raised in the church may miss God entirely.

BIG IDEA: Wise men and women humbly follow the signs and providence of God

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** How do you think the wise men were able to perceive more than even the Jews could?

- **Question:** What is the significance of the three gifts the wise

- **Question:** How would you feel if you were Jesus' parents experiencing the difficulty of His first few years of earthly life?

- **Question:** Egypt is a really significant place in the Old Testament. Why might it be significant that Jesus also entered into Egypt?

- **Question:** How does the reality of Jesus' protection amidst danger affect our spiritual lives and confidence today?

Week 4: Matthew 2:13-23

Day 2: Understanding the Old Testament

READ: Matthew 2:13-23 and Hosea 11:1-2

EXPLORE:

When reading through the Gospels, and particularly the Gospel of Matthew, it's important to notice that the writers don't frame their writing as a new story to be told, but rather as the continuation of a very old story. The life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus are inextricably linked to the Old Testament, and Matthew goes to great lengths to highlight this at the beginning of Jesus' life by citing three examples of prophetic fulfillment in our passage this week.²⁵

In many ways, Matthew is using these references to teach us how to understand and interpret the Old Testament. Chances are the first thing you think of when hearing of a "fulfillment" is that it follows some sort of prediction. And this is often the case. A prophet predicts something in the Old Testament, and then we see it happen in the New Testament.²⁶ But Matthew wants to broaden our understanding of the relationship between the testaments. Take, for example, the fulfillment referenced in 2:15, "*out of Egypt I called my son.*" On the surface this looks like the culmination of a simple prediction, but when we go back and read the original reference in Hosea 11:1-2, we see something very different. Here the prophet isn't predicting anything at all. He is reminiscing about a prior event (the Israelites' exodus out of Egypt). It's not a prediction about the future, Hosea's actually looking back in time not forward, yet Matthew says Jesus "fulfilled" this historical event that already happened. What's going on here?

Well, by approaching the Old Testament in this way, Matthew is presenting for us a new theological framework for understanding Scripture. He's teaching us that the entire Old Testament story, its

²⁵ Matthew 2:15, 2:17, and 2:23 all rely on similar wording to communicate "this fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet", a formulaic structure Matthew uses 10 times throughout his gospel, but 3 times in just these 11 verses alone!

²⁶ See, for example, the predictions of Micah 5:2 or Isaiah 53:5

history, the events, its people, their institutions — they all prefigure the New Testament — and specifically, they all provide us a lens through which to fully understand the person and work of Jesus. This is why Matthew can present Israel’s experience as pointing toward, foreshadowing, and finding its fulfillment in Jesus. It’s also why Jesus himself can point to Jonah as a sign of his coming death and resurrection in Matthew 12:38-40, even though the prophet Jonah never actually made any messianic predictions. And it’s this understanding of Scripture that sheds light on Matthew’s unusual conclusion in 2:23.

The town of Nazareth is surprisingly not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, so how could the prophets have spoken of Jesus being a Nazarene? The answer is, they didn’t, at least not explicitly. The collective voice of the Old Testament, however, regularly describes the coming Messiah as having a humble background, being despised, rejected, and unrecognized, and there is strong evidence from the first century that “Nazarene” was a derogatory term applied to Christians.²⁷ In verse 23, Matthew teaches us that Jesus fulfills the entire sense of the Messiah given by the Old Testament, while also encouraging his readers that Jesus too was scoffed at, derided, and treated as having come from nowhere. Appreciating the continuity of scripture and reading the whole Bible as telling us something of Jesus reveals these beautiful connections for us.

BIG IDEA: Matthew teaches us to read every aspect of the Old Testament with an eye toward what it reveals about Jesus, His mission, and His place in redemptive history.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Consider various events, institutions, and people from the Old Testament and, like Matthew, identify ways in which Jesus fulfills their meaning.

²⁷ See the charges against Paul in Acts 24:5 for one possible Biblical example

Week 4: Matthew 2:13-23

Day 3: Exile and Exodus

READ: Matthew 2:13-23, Jeremiah 31:10-17, Jeremiah 31:31-34

EXPLORE:

Yesterday we introduced how Matthew very intentionally places the beginning of Jesus' life in the context of the Old Testament. And today, we'll build on this idea to explore one of the most prominent themes across scripture: exile and exodus.

We've already discussed how Matthew uses *"out of Egypt I called my son"* in verse 15 to connect Jesus to the nation of Israel and a critical event in their history. Interestingly, the prophetic fulfillment cited after Herod's murder of the Bethlehem infants does the same thing. The quotation in 2:18 originally comes from Jeremiah 31:15 where the prophet poetically describes Rachel crying out from her grave in despair as she sees her children (the nation of Israel) being deported during the Babylonian exile. Ramah was a gathering point, where the Babylonians assembled Israelites before marching them off to exile. And just as there was weeping as the nation was carried off to exile, we have the pain and suffering of the mothers in Bethlehem as Jesus is carried off to Egypt. So with Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15 (*"out of Egypt"* and *"Rachel weeping"*), Matthew presents Jesus as a new Israel, connecting him to both exodus and exile, the two defining moments of the nation's history.

Going back to Jeremiah 31, however, what stands out isn't this one verse about Rachel that describes the exile, but the fact that every other verse in the entire chapter looks ahead to restoration. *"There is hope for your future, declares the LORD"* in Jeremiah 31:17. And that hope is the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Throughout Israel's history exile and exodus are tightly coupled. One is the result of the people's sins against God, and the other is God's deliverance from that bondage. When describing the nation's exile, the prophets often described it as a *"return to Egypt"*, and just as

bondage in Egypt was followed by exodus, the prophets often depict the nation's return from exile as a second exodus.²⁸ This idea that exile is followed by exodus is perhaps the most important theme throughout all of scripture. That's what Jeremiah 31 is looking forward to, a new covenant and a new exodus. And Matthew, in quoting Jeremiah, wants us to have that same forward thinking when it comes to Jesus.

As Jesus is introduced as an infant, right out of the gate we see that he experiences and fulfills Israel's past exile. Thus, as we look forward, it's not Rachel weeping that matters, but it's the rest of Jeremiah 31 that we should look to. Jesus' entire life, his entire purpose from this point forward, is all about exodus, because if we go back and survey the Old Testament, there's still one exile that never had a return. There's still one exile that's hanging over our heads that never had an exodus — the very first one, humanity's exile from the garden in Genesis 3. And it's right here in Matthew Chapter 2 that we are pointed straight to the cross.

At the transfiguration in Luke 9:28-31 we read of Jesus speaking to Moses and Elijah about "*his departure which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.*" The Greek word translated here as "*departure*" is actually "*exodus*". Jesus' death on the cross, which he is to accomplish in Jerusalem, is the exodus that brings us back from exile, our exile from the garden and our bondage to sin.

BIG IDEA: Jesus' life, from the very beginning, is aimed at leading our return from exile and restoring our relationship with God.

APPLY:

- **Pray:** Spend a few moments reflecting on the enormity of God's grace, that he would empty himself to come into our world and lead a lost people home. Pray in thanksgiving for that great gift.

²⁸ See Hosea 8:13, Hosea 9:3, Zechariah 10:8-12, and Isaiah 11:15-16 for a few examples of both types of language

Week 4: Matthew 2:13-23

Day 4: Protection in Obedience

READ: Matthew 2:13-23

EXPLORE:

Today's text reveals the persecution of Christ that takes place shortly after He was born in fulfillment of Hosea 2:15 and Jeremiah 31:15. Between one and two years of age, Jesus finds Himself under attack from King Herod who seeks to take His life and is willing to kill every young boy in Bethlehem to accomplish this. Through a dream an angel communicates this present danger to Joseph and instructs him to take his son and wife and flee to Egypt, approximately 90 miles away from Bethlehem. Can you imagine taking your baby in the middle of the night and traveling 90 miles on the back of a donkey or on foot under the threat of losing your child? This intense persecution precedes and reflects the persecution that will come later in Christ's life and to all the disciples who follow Him. Matthew 16:21 states *"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* Jesus teaches that the proclamation of the gospel and the foundation of the Church rides on the back of persecution for nothing can thwart God's purposes from being accomplished.

Consider the state Jesus finds Himself in when He undergoes this persecution from Herod. He is a small child, 1-2 years of age. He is helpless, vulnerable, and completely dependent on His parents for His every need. He can do nothing to save Himself nor protect Himself from the impending destruction Herod desires to bring. Nevertheless, through the obedience of His earthly parents, He is saved, allowing Him to later go to Nazareth, fulfill the Scriptures,

grow, and begin His ministry. What does this mean for us? When we are obedient to God, we are protected from the destruction of our enemies. Will we still be persecuted? Yes, but we will not be overcome.²⁹ We do not have to be “strong enough,” “ready enough,” or “good enough” to earn God’s protection or for His will to be accomplished in our lives. All God requires is a heart of faith even in our weakness, vulnerability, and incapacities. Matthew 16:24-25 states *“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’”* As we take one step after another in obedience, He sustains and protects His children, and we are blessed in the process.

BIG IDEA: Christ endured persecution in an incredibly vulnerable state. We are called to trust and obey that persecuted Savior and protective God who make provisions for us despite hardships and inadequacies.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. What are your current weaknesses or vulnerabilities? Take some time to surrender these weaknesses to the Lord and ask Him to magnify Himself through them.
- **Questions:** What insecurities do you have that are hindering you from walking in obedience (appearance, finances, occupation, friendships, marital status, etc.)? Have you asked Him to use these insecurities for His purposes? If not, take time to do that now.

²⁹ See 2 Corinthians 4:8-12 for reference.

Week 4: Matthew 2:13-23

Day 5: The Flight to Egypt and Return to Nazareth

READ TOGETHER: Revelation 12:4, Matthew 10:23, Isaiah 51:12-13, Psalm 37:39-40

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Soon after the joyous visit of the wise men in their home, the family of Jesus must leave. They thought they had a special place there in Bethlehem. This was the city of David, and it seemed appropriate that Jesus would grow up there, but God had other plans. Joseph did not know that Jesus was in danger until they angel came and told him the secret thoughts of Herod. The angel also gave him divine instructions of where to take the child. When God gives us a great task and responsibility, He does not leave us to rely upon our own wisdom to see it accomplished.

Herod was an Edomite and a clear enemy of God. At first, he just wanted to kill Jesus, but after being tricked by the wise men his plans of execution expanded to all children in the region who were two years old and younger. This story has many echoes of the Exodus and the patriarchs. We remember how the Pharaoh in Exodus chapter 1 commanded the execution of the male children born in Israel. We also notice that this is not the first Joseph (Genesis 39) that must flee his brethren for Egypt to stay safe. In all the of these scenarios what man meant for evil, God uses for God.

An angel appeared to Joseph again and told him to return to the land of Israel because those who sought Jesus' life were dead. We must be patient for the direction of the Lord in our lives. He does not dictate to us our entire future but would rather have us learn daily dependence upon Him. This is how it came about that Jesus would be a man of Galilee from Nazareth. Imagine all the wonderful stories concerning the Sea of Galilee that would have been missed had Jesus not been persecuted as a child. Nazareth was not a prominent city like Bethlehem, but once again God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

BIG IDEA: What man meant for evil, God meant for good.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What other parallels do you see in the Old Testament and this passage of Scripture?
- **Question:** Why do you think God chooses what is foolish to shame the wise and can you give a modern day example of this?

- **Question:** What does it mean to repent? When was the last time you actively repented?

- **Question:** In the context of the larger passage, what do you think it means to *prepare the way of the Lord; making his paths straight*?

- **Question:** What do you notice about how John the Baptist is described in v. 4?

- **Optional Activity:** *Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordan region* are significant to each of the four Gospel accounts, but they are important for Matthew especially. If time allows, use an online or physical concordance to study how these geographical references appear in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Week 5: Matthew 3:1-6

Day 2: The Kingdom of God

READ: Matthew 3:1-6

EXPLORE:

If you were seeking spiritual guidance— say, for instance, you had a question about the kingdom of heaven— what would you do? Would you text your pastor? Crack open a Bible? Google it? Or would you pack up a few days' worth of supplies, grab your family, and disembark on a journey out into the Judean wilderness until you came upon a man wearing a camel skin poncho, munching on some locusts, and strike up a conversation with him about it? Well, if you lived in early first-century Roman Palestine, you might have done just that. In fact, Scripture says that when John the Baptist, a man who fit just such a description, began teaching and baptizing along the Jordan river, *“Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan”*³⁰ were going out to see him.

John the Baptist had been called by the Lord from before his conception to act as a prophet, and his very first message from the Lord gave listeners plenty to think about: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*³¹ That was it. They were to repent, confess their sins, and be baptized.³² Why? Because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Something was about to happen, and John was charged with challenging his listeners, to break down the barriers around their hearts and turn their eyes back to God, in preparation for whatever he had planned next.

But what even is the kingdom of heaven? And what does it mean for it to be “at hand?” It’s an important question, especially when you consider that Jesus spent more time discussing the kingdom of heaven than he did any other topic throughout the gospel.³³

First, let's talk about the terms “kingdom of heaven” vs “kingdom of God.” The passages using “heaven” instead of “God” only appear in the gospel of Matthew,⁶ while the other gospels exclusively use “kingdom of God.” There is still some debate on whether these two terms mean the same thing, with some scholars arguing that the two are different, and others asserting that they are

³⁰ See Matthew 3:5 for reference.

³¹ See Luke 1:5-25 and Matthew 3:2 for reference.

³² See Matthew 3:6 for reference.

³³ See Matthew 13 for examples in the form of parables.

interchangeable.³⁴ I (Tim Brown) personally believe they're interchangeable, but either way, it does not significantly shift the context being considered.³⁵

A kingdom, at its core, is a group of people who are subject to a king. Earthly kingdoms are defined and limited by their geographic boundaries, but the kingdom of heaven is different. It's made up of every person whose heart and loyalty belong to the Lord in faith. Jesus, in the course of his ministry, would go on to defeat the ruler of this world at the cross and establish for himself a people, that is, a kingdom, in every person who places his or her faith in him.³⁶ That is the kingdom John was referring to two-thousand years ago, but not in its entirety. There's a second act to God's plan, so to speak, in the Second Coming of Christ. One day, Jesus will return to establish his kingdom physically, eternally, and completely.³⁷

BIG IDEA: The establishment of God's kingdom is the central theme of the Gospel, from the beginning to the very end.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** "Already, but not yet" is a useful way to think about God's kingdom. Read John 18:36, 1 Peter 2:9, and Revelation 21:2-4. Try to tie these truths together with respect to a kingdom that has "already" been established, but "not yet" completed.
- **Question:** The progression from monarchy to democracy is considered an important advancement in the history of human governance. How does God's kingdom, and God's rule, compare to historical kings and kingdoms? How might it be preferable to be part of such a kingdom?

³⁴ Unger's Bible Dictionary, 1988 Edition – entry *Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven* (pg. 740)

³⁵ Jesus gives this exact same statement in Matthew 4:17, which is paralleled in Mark 1:15. Matthew records "*heaven*" and Mark records "*God*" for the same teaching, demonstrating their interchangeability in this instance

³⁶ See John 12:31-32 and 1 Peter 2:9 for reference.

³⁷ See Revelation 21:3-4 for reference.

Week 5: Matthew 3:1-6

Day 3: Make His Paths Straight

READ: Matthew 3:1-6

EXPLORE:

Imagine you have finally arrived at a mountain you have had on your bucket list for as long as you can remember. Others you have known have climbed it and they received praise. Now it's your time to shine but you want to up the ante. You want *ample* praise, perhaps even go down in history. Hold on to this thought. We will revisit it at the end of today's study.

Our text begins with an incredible message, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" The fulfillment of a glorious prophecy was announced, brought by the prophet Isaiah roughly 700 years prior. It was time to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. John the Baptist was preparing others for the promised Messiah and the people were invited to respond with repentance and belief. In His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, Jesus did not merely prepare a way, He is the way! We could rightly say that Christ Himself is the highway. He made it possible for us, a once unholy people made holy by his blood, to see Him and glorify Him. Just as Israel and other nations were cut off and the prophecy gave them hope that they would be restored,³⁸ this announcement is for a new Israel, our eternal identity. Because of Christ, we now have a certain and clear access to God. Hallelujah!

We would benefit by asking, "How can we participate in making the path straight?" Fundamentally, we submit our lives for the gospel. Isaiah 35:8 says that the highway does not belong to the unclean, but for those who walk in the way of holiness. There was

³⁸ See Isaiah 11:16 for reference.

a call to remove stones for the people to walk unhindered.³⁹ Are you making way for the Lord? Are you removing stumbling stones to have a path to a glorious relationship with God? Are you laying out your robes to honor Him in exchange for what He has done in your life? Are you raising your voice to declare the lamb of God, who came to take away the penalty of sin for those who would believe?⁴⁰

Go back to the impressive mountain that I (Sarah) asked you to imagine at the beginning of today's study. As you set your eyes toward the peak, the question remains, "How will you respond to the path that has been made?" Would you start on the path which has been cleared only to apathetically settle for the view halfway? In obstinacy, would you try to blaze your own trail in a stubborn search for glory, failing to reach the summit after a treacherous and unsurprising fall? Or, as we are encouraged by Scripture, would you acknowledge and embrace the role of the path which God has provided? There is only one way that has been made for humanity to be made right with God. So, is it your way or the highway? Or do you embrace the way that is Christ and, in submission, surrender your life to clearly communicate His holiness, lordship, and sufficiency?

BIG IDEA: By submitting our lives to God and proclaiming what Christ has done we can show others how Jesus is the way of salvation.

- **Question:** What are some examples of trying to take the easy way to get to Christ? What about taking your own way, or settling? How are these false gospels?

³⁹ See Isaiah 62:10-12 for reference.

⁴⁰ See John 1:29 for reference.

Week 5: Matthew 3:1-6

Day 4: Important Distinctions

READ: Matthew 3:1-6; Acts 2:38; Acts 19:1-7; Romans 6:1-14

EXPLORE:

Today, we will unpack a couple important distinctions:

John's Baptism vs. Baptism in Christ: Both are water baptisms associated with repentance and forgiveness of sin. However, John's baptism was a baptism of preparation for the coming Christ. It was merely a precursor to Christian baptism. All of history hinges on the death and resurrection of Christ. John's baptism occurred before this pivotal event; baptism into Christ occurs after.

The significance of John's baptism is that it prepared people to receive Christ: *"the people... declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."*⁴¹ Those who rejected John's baptism were unprepared for the coming of Christ.

After rising from the dead, Christ commissioned his followers to baptize *"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*⁴² In this baptism, the believer identifies with Christ's death and resurrection. The going under the water signifies dying to our old self, as our old sinful nature is nailed to the cross with Christ and buried with him. The rising up from the water signifies our new life in Christ since Christ has conquered sin and death.

When Paul encountered disciples of John who had neither been baptized into Christ nor received the Holy Spirit, he told them that John baptized so that his disciples would *"believe in the one [Jesus] who was to come after him."* They were then baptized into Christ and received the Holy Spirit, becoming disciples of Christ.⁴³

⁴¹ See Luke 7:29-30 for reference.

⁴² See Matthew 28:29 for reference.

⁴³ See Acts 19:1-7 for reference.

“Gospel”— Two Related Meanings: The most important meaning of “gospel” is the **good news** of salvation through Jesus Christ: *“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures....”*⁴⁴

A related meaning of “gospel” is an account, written by man and inspired by God, of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The four Gospel accounts together bring us a full picture of the Lord our Savior. *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*⁴⁵

BIG IDEA: John’s baptism was a precursor to Christian baptism, which is a picture of the gospel: The good news about the death and resurrection of Jesus for salvation of all who believe.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read Galatians 1:1-9. What false gospel are you tempted to believe? How is the one true gospel different?
- **Question:** If you are a disciple of Christ but have not been baptized, what is hindering you?

⁴⁴ See 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 for reference.

⁴⁵ See John 20:30-31 for reference. See also Matthew 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-4.

Week 5: Matthew 3:1-6

Day 5: John the Baptist Appears

READ TOGETHER: Malachi 3:1-4, Isaiah 40:3-4, 2 Kings 1:8

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Matthew jumps ahead in the gospel story to Jesus' adulthood and starts with his forerunner John the Baptist. One could say that John the Baptist is the most important prophet of Israel because he prepared the way of the Lord. When we first read of him, he came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. He did not come to listen, nor did he come to rule, but he came with a message from God.

His message was one of repentance. A much-needed message in Israel's day as we have seen. We note how only a few came to worship the birth of the Messiah. The religious leaders of the day had sought a righteousness of their own rather than a righteousness from God. The spiritual leadership of the nation was poor and therefore so was the general populace. They did not need a light-hearted message. They needed a message that all fallen men and women need. A confession that they were corrupt in every part of their being.

He grounded his message in the truth that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The long-awaited kingdom of God was upon them. They were not being called to repent for any earthly blessing or to

avoid national judgement. They were being called to repent for a spiritual kingdom with an eye towards an eternal home with God. There is no greater motivation for people to repent than this.

John's role was to prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight. In ancient times an officer would be sent before a great man or king to prepare his way. It is like throwing out the proverbial red carpet. However, this was no glitz and glamour. John came humbly in plain clothes, and he maintained a plain diet. John was more concerned with spiritual food and clothing himself in righteousness. John prepared the way of the Lord with his message. He removed their faulty conceptions of God and of themselves. Through John's message many were humbled, confessed their sins, and demonstrating their allegiance to God through baptism. John led a revival before the ministry of Jesus began.

BIG IDEA: All men and women need to hear the message of repentance.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What is significant about the clothing and diet of John the Baptist? What does it teach us about godliness?

- **Question:** How do you think we can prepare the way for people to receive the gospel message? What should we say?



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