

By Matthew, the apostle

All the Gospels are anonymous. But when early Christians began collecting them in the second century, they needed a way to distinguish each one from the others. So they gave them titles. The title “According to Matthew” is affixed to this Gospel because church tradition had credited it to Matthew, one of the twelve. It is fitting that Matthew’s Gospel is the first book in the New Testament because it was the favorite Gospel of the early Christians. You see, the first disciples were all Jews; and Matthew sought to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of David, sent by God to rule His kingdom. So Matthew, more than the other Gospel writers, found Jesus’ messiahship in strange and wonderful places where Jews would know to look: in genealogies, titles, numerology, and fulfilled prophecies.

Matthew wants his mainly Jewish audience, as God’s chosen people, to consider how Jesus is the true son of Abraham, the ideal for Israel, even the perfect candidate to be the Anointed One. So he shows how Jesus identified with Israel—even with their spending time in exile in Egypt—and yet, unlike Israel, He did not fall into disobedience. As Matthew tells the story, Jesus has come to fill the Scripture full by His teachings and His example. In this way, Jesus is a new Moses, a new Lawgiver. But again, He is greater than Moses because He gives the law and writes it directly on the hearts of His disciples and of any who care to overhear the message of the kingdom of heaven. According to Matthew, five sermons of Jesus complete the picture of Jesus as Lawgiver. They don’t replace the five books of Torah, but His words refine and complement God’s instruction to the people of the new covenant.

For Matthew, Jesus is more than the Messiah, the fulfiller of prophecies, the true son of Abraham, and the new Moses who brings a new law: He is “God with us” who promises to be with us forever. That means that Jesus is no mere mortal: He is God in the flesh who saves us from our sins. The coming of Jesus into the world fulfills God’s earlier promises to bring about redemption and a new creation. These images of Jesus that Matthew paints so beautifully fired the imaginations of Christians for centuries so that today, when we open our New Testaments, we find Matthew is first in line.

A reading from the beginning of the holy Gospel, according to Matthew

This is the family history, the genealogy, of Jesus the Anointed, the coming King. You will see in this history that Jesus is descended from King David, and that He is also descended from Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac; Isaac was the father of Jacob; Jacob was the father of Judah and of Judah's 11 brothers; Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (and their mother was Tamar);

Perez was the father of Hezron; who was the father of Ram; who was the father of Amminadab; who was the father of Nahshon; who was the father of Salmon; who was the father of Boaz (his mother was Rahab);

Boaz was the father of Obed (his mother was Ruth, a Moabite woman who converted to the Hebrew faith); Obed was the father of Jesse; and Jesse was the father of David, who was the king of the nation of Israel. David was the father of Solomon (his mother was Bathsheba, and she was married to a man named Uriah);

Solomon was the father of Rehoboam; who was the father of Abijah; who was the father of Asa; who was the father of Jehoshaphat; who was the father of Joram; who was the father of Uzziah; who was the father of Jotham; who was the father of Ahaz; Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah; who was the father of Manasseh; who was the father of Amon; who was the father of Josiah; who was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, and Josiah's family lived at the time when God's chosen people of Israel were deported from the promised land to Babylon.

After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah had a son, Shealtiel. He was the father of Zerubbabel; who was the father of Abiud; who was the father of Eliakim; who was the father of Azor; who was the father of Zadok; who was the father of Achim; who was the father of Eliud; who was the father of Eleazar; who was the father of Matthan; who was the father of Jacob; Jacob was the father of Joseph, who married a woman named Mary. It was Mary who gave birth to Jesus, and it is Jesus who is the Savior, the Anointed One.

Abraham and David were linked with 14 generations, 14 generations link David to the Babylonian exile, and 14 more take us from the exile to the birth of the Anointed.

So here, finally, is the story of the birth of Jesus the Anointed (*– it is quite a remarkable story*):

Mary was engaged to marry Joseph, son of David. They hadn't married. And yet, some time *well before their wedding date*, Mary learned that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, because he was kind and upstanding and honourable, wanted to spare Mary shame. He did not wish to cause her more embarrassment than necessary.

Now when Joseph had decided to act on his instincts, a messenger of the Lord came to him in a dream.

The Messenger said: Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to wed Mary and bring her into your home and family as your wife. She did not sneak off and sleep with someone else — rather, she conceived the baby she now carries through the miraculous wonderworking of the Holy Spirit. She will have a son, and you will name Him Jesus, which means “the Lord saves,” because this Jesus is the person who will save all of His people from sin.

Joseph woke up from his dream and did exactly what the messenger had told him to do: he married Mary and brought her into his home as his wife (though he did not consummate their marriage until after her son was born). And when the baby was born, Joseph named Him Jesus, Savior.

Years and years ago, Isaiah, a prophet of Israel, foretold the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus:

A virgin will conceive and bear a Son,
and His name will be Immanuel

(which is a Hebrew name that means “God with us”).

The Gospel of the Lord.