

JANUARY 1

Matthew 1:1–17

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

REFLECTION

Matthew begins his book with a genealogy to show that Jesus continues the Old Testament story of God's grace to his disobedient people. To show this connection, the "family tree" begins and ends with three great names in Israelite history: Abraham, David, and Jesus (1:1, 17).

The ancestry of Jesus also reminds us that God accepts sinful and outcast people. Five women appear in the list: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, "the wife of Uriah" (Bathsheba), and Mary. These women faced great social difficulty, but God treated them mercifully and used them in his plan to save his people. Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were involved in sexual sin (Genesis 38; Joshua 2; 2 Sam. 11:1–12:23). Ruth was a desperately poor immigrant field-worker (Ruth 2:2), and Mary, although innocent, was falsely thought to have been unfaithful to her fiancé, Joseph (Matt. 1:19).

Despite lives made difficult by poverty and sin, God helped these women and gave them important places in his plan to “save his people from their sins” (v. 21). This reminds believers that God powerfully saves those who have faith in him (Rom. 1:16) and that “God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:11). He saves ungodly people (Rom. 4:5) and uses outcasts for his saving purposes (1 Cor. 1:26–30; 2 Cor. 12:9).

Romans 1:1–7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION

God fulfills his promises. In a world that worships hundreds of gods, there is only one God who sends “the gospel” (Rom. 1:1). The word “gospel” means “good news.” When the Bible uses the word it is specifically referring to the good news of a Savior who conquers sin, destroys death, and will rescue the creation from its decay (8:18–39). This gospel was promised in the Old Testament (1:2). The Scripture pointed to David’s Descendant, God’s Son, who was raised from the dead to demonstrate God’s power and affirmation of Jesus’ saving work on the cross (v. 4). To proclaim the message of salvation, God graciously set apart messengers (apostles) like Paul (vv. 1, 6). They announced a message to be received “among all the nations” (v. 5), in fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the world through Abraham (see Gen. 12:1–3). That message and blessing continue to spread throughout the world today.

Psalms 96:7–9

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

God is graciously spreading the gospel throughout the world, offering the only true remedy for sin and death. Take a moment to thank him for bringing the gospel into your life, and ask him to use you to bring that same blessing into the lives of others.

JANUARY 2

Matthew 1:18–25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

REFLECTION

The angel’s message to Joseph is good news. Mary’s Son will bring the salvation of the Lord. He will save people not merely in the physical sense (Matt. 8:25; 10:22) but in the most important sense because he will bring salvation from sins. Everyone has sinned against God, failing to worship him and causing tragic harm to others (Rom. 1:18–32; 3:9–20, 23), but God sent Jesus to clearly show us that he is a merciful and forgiving God (Ps. 130:3–4, 7–8).

Jesus, who is God, came to earth and fulfilled the promise in Isaiah 7:14 that “Immanuel” would come (Matt. 1:23). When Jesus was among his people, God himself was with them (8:23–27). In the Old Testament, the greatest blessing to God’s people was when he actually lived among them (Ex. 29:46; Lev. 26:11–12), but the relationship was spoiled by their rebellion against him. In Jesus, God has provided salvation from sin and has healed the broken relationship between himself and his people. When God sent his Son Jesus, he made it possible for God to be “with” his disciples “always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

Romans 1:8–15

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹²that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often

intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

REFLECTION

Those who know God through faith in Christ deeply desire to make him known to others. Paul longs to visit Rome “to preach the gospel” there (Rom. 1:15) and through mutual encouragement (v. 12) to take the gospel to even more distant lands, like Spain (see 15:24)—which is a reminder to all who receive the gospel of our need to share the gospel with those still unreached.

At the same time, the gospel message is not merely intended to produce new converts. It is also vitally relevant for those who already believe in Christ in every area of life. Notice that Paul says he is “eager to preach the gospel” to the Roman church—those who already knew the message (1:15). We are told that the good news is actually “the power of God” (v. 16). Paul viewed the gospel as the daily food for every human heart.

Psalm 46:7

The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Remember that God sent Jesus to be with you (Matt. 1:23) so that you don't have to live in isolation from God. Draw near to him now; he is with you today, and he is for you.

JANUARY 3

Matthew 2:1–12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

- ⁶ “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

REFLECTION

The “wise men” would have been pagan astrologers from the areas east of Israel. They remind us that there is only one God, the Creator of the universe (Rom. 1:18–21; 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6), and that he desires all people to worship him from the heart (John 4:23). Although God chose Abraham’s descendants as his special people, they were supposed to communicate God’s merciful and forgiving character to the rest of the world (Ex. 19:6). Here Matthew is showing us that the fulfillment of this blessing to the nations has begun.

As the church reaches out with the gospel to every culture and ethnic group, it continues to fulfill the plan of God to bring his blessing to the entire world (Eph. 3:7–10). The Wise Men who experienced an overwhelming joy in finding someone worthy of their worship (Matt. 2:10–11) are just a glimpse into God’s ongoing mission of making worshipers of Jesus from all the nations of the world.

Romans 1:16–17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

REFLECTION

Paul speaks of the power of the good news of Jesus’ life, his saving death, and his resurrection. Through the proclamation of this message, Jesus’ words and work save “everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16), regardless of their identity, social location, or ethnicity. In the gospel, “the righteousness of God” (God’s righteous judgment of our sin by putting Christ to death for us) “is revealed” to those who believe in Christ (v. 17). In Habakkuk 2:4, which is quoted here in Romans 1:17, the Old Testament Scripture foretold that God’s people would obtain life through faith.

Psalms 37:39

The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
he is their stronghold in the time of trouble.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Even though we can do nothing to earn our salvation, we have reason to hope. Offer your thanks and praise to God for providing his saving power to you through the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

JANUARY 4

Matthew 2:13–23

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

¹⁹But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” ²¹And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

REFLECTION

Jesus did not enjoy the social status of a typical king. After fleeing threats from King Herod and his son Archelaus, Joseph eventually settled his family in Nazareth, raising the Son of God in a small Galilean village with a negative reputation (see John 1:46). As predicted by the Old Testament, Jesus would be called a Nazarene—his entire life would be marked with insults and rejection (see Ps. 22:6; Isa. 49:7; 53:3). From the standards of the world, therefore, Jesus seemed unimpressive and even foolish (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22). However, in this modest disguise there was “secret and hidden” wisdom (1 Cor. 2:7). Jesus had gladly embraced this humble calling because he knew that his rejection was ultimately for the sake of our acceptance.

Romans 1:18–32

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

REFLECTION

The gospel message is urgent in the light of God's verdict on humanity. Our transgression deserves God's wrath (Rom. 1:18). Verses 21–27 include a wide range of transgressions, all of which are dreadful in God's sight (vv. 26–27). We are all guilty of multiple sins described in this passage (see vv. 28–31). Even if we do not practice every sinful deed found here, we may secretly approve and even envy when others cross God's moral boundaries. Because of this, we fail to love God (because we break his commandments) and to love our neighbor (because we support our neighbors in their sin). The outcome is God's rightful judgment.

Behind the good news of the gospel lies the tough news that all people are guilty of acts and attitudes that God has promised to punish unless we embrace his grace. The gospel is the antidote to our sin, because it tells us that God is willing to forgive us. When we believe God's promise, our lives grow in the richness of knowing and being known by Christ.

Psalm 86:4–5

Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.
For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Because of the forgiveness that Christ has purchased, Christians can be open with God about our sin without the fear of being rejected by him. Be honest with God, confessing to him any known sin in your life, and believe in his promise to graciously forgive you (1 John 1:9).

JANUARY 5*Matthew 3:1–12*

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”³For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

REFLECTION

John the Baptist explains what it means to truly repent. Repentance involves a heart-change that leads to a transformed life. Those who repent, confess their sin (Matt. 3:6). In other words, they admit they have not been obedient to God. They have failed to love and worship him as he deserves and they have failed

to love others as he desires. Those who repent also understand that they deserve God's punishment for their sins (vv. 2, 7, 10–12). They come to God trusting only in the mercy of God. Furthermore, repentance leads to a change in our lifestyle, so that we turn from sinful behavior to behavior that honors God and acts lovingly toward others (vv. 8, 10).

People often mistakenly believe that repentance begins with changing our behavior so that we can gain God's acceptance. In truth, repentance begins when the Holy Spirit graciously creates an internal change in our perspective about ourselves, God, and the consequences of our sin. This change of heart is what actually fuels the change in our behavior (cf. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23–24).

Romans 2:1–11

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹For God shows no partiality.

REFLECTION

Paul continues to explain humanity's desperate situation. People condemn themselves by hypocritically doing the very things they say others shouldn't do (Rom. 2:1). Paul's questions expose the guilt of us all (vv. 3–4).

God kindly gives us time to repent and change, but some refuse the opportunity and continue to invite God's anger, which he will someday release when he comes to judge the world (v. 5). Others will seek God and receive eternal life (v. 7) through faith in Christ's finished work (cf. 3:22). One way (2:9) or the other (v. 10), people's choices will position them before God in ways that will bring either great joy or bitter regret, in this life and the next.

Psalms 19:13

Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

We must be careful not to allow ourselves to become comfortable with sin in our lives. Ask God to give you a desire for his ways so that you will have strength to turn quickly from sin when you see it in your life.

JANUARY 6***Matthew 3:13–17***

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

REFLECTION

Baptism is how Christians demonstrate that they identify themselves with Jesus and his kingdom. John was surprised to see Jesus coming to him for baptism because, as John had just said, he was baptizing those who needed to turn away from their sin (Matt. 3:11). However, even though Jesus never sinned, he came to John to be baptized in order to show his followers the importance of this symbolic action.

Romans 2:12–24

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

¹⁷But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²²You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who boast in the law