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SESSION 1

ARROY THE ROYAL FAMILY THE KING

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, you promised to be with us always, and You give us the gift of your living Word and the gift of your Eucharist to remind us of that everlasting promise. Open our minds today, Lord, that we would see Your face and hear Your voice in a new way. Holy Spirit, move through us as you moved through St. Matthew, and reveal to us all the ways we need to surrender to God, all the ways we can abandon our own plans and follow Christ as St. Matthew did in his lifetime. May all we do this day and in this study lead us closer to Jesus Christ and help us in our efforts to build His Church on earth. And may our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary join Her prayers to ours throughout this study. Amen. (*Pray a Hail Mary.*)

Before you can take a road trip, there are several things you should do, i.e., put gas in the car, stock up on food and drinks, change the oil, get ahold of a map, visit the rest room (that one last time) and, if necessary, find a safer driver than you.

Similarly, before you can really take a trip through the Bible, especially a gospel, you need to prepare yourself. You need to be alert, open (mentally and spiritually), and ready. You need to know your way around “the car,” and you need a map to get you where you are going.

In this first session, try to picture yourself starting from scratch. Whether you know a ton about the gospels or very little, imagine yourself as a blank piece of paper that God desires to fill with knowledge. Then, each week, as you move deeper into the living Word of God and deeper into the heart your Savior, Jesus Christ, imagine yourself coming back again and again as a blank sheet, wanting to be filled.

THE CHAPTERS COVERED IN THIS LESSON

An Introduction to Matthew

OPENING QUESTION

Why is it important for *you* to know the Gospel?

VERSE TO REMEMBER

Matthew 7:7 - “Ask and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

BREAKING IT DOWN

1. What does the word “gospel” mean?
Good News (*evangelium* is “good news” in Latin)
2. What was Matthew’s “other name”?
Levi (see Luke 5:27)

3. What was Matthew's profession prior to following Jesus?
Tax collector (see 10:3)
4. What did Matthew do for Jesus after his encounter with the Lord?
Matthew throws a great banquet feast for Jesus (see Luke 5:29).
5. To whom was St. Matthew writing his gospel?
Matthew was writing to the Jewish people.
6. What does Matthew assume about his readers?
Matthew assumes that his audience knows Jewish history, Jewish culture, and the Torah.
7. What are the three titles given (in Matthew 1:1) to Jesus?
The Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham
8. What is the term for "reading out" of the gospels, their intended meaning(s)?
Exegesis
9. Why do the gospels "disagree" on details at times?
There are several writers who have different perspectives of the same events.
10. What "themes" does Matthew focus on in his gospel?
Jesus the (Messiah and) King establishing His Kingdom on earth.

Play the DVD - Disc 1, Segment 1

TALKING IT OUT

Discussion Questions

1. Why is "the journey between the head and the heart" so difficult? Why do so many people get stuck in academic questions about the existence of God or the truths about Jesus Christ? Where does faith come in?
2. Why is a relationship with Jesus Christ the most important relationship you will ever have?
3. Why would God give us Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition? Why not just one or the other? Why are both so vital to the truth and to the Church?

THINKING IT THROUGH

Where would you rate yourself (1 to 10) based on the question "How well do you know Jesus"? What do you need to eliminate in your life before you would rate yourself higher? What do you need to "add" into your life in order to rate yourself higher?

BIBLE STUDY 1

DUEL IN THE DESERT:
THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

OPENING PRAYER

Let's take a moment and enter into the presence of God. (Pause for some silent time). *Lord Jesus, You know well the temptations of this world, yet You did not bow or yield to them. Open our eyes in this study of Your word, Lord, to more clearly see the temptations in our world that we so easily and so often succumb to and through the power of the Holy Spirit, grant us the strength we need to avoid them. Amen.*

ENTERING THE STORY

A reading from the gospel of St. Matthew...

Read Matthew 4:1-11

This is the Word of the Lord.

BREAKING IT DOWN

Who is involved? Jesus and Satan.

What is happening? The devil is trying to test Jesus and get Him to reveal His identity.

When does this take place? After Jesus' baptism and forty-day fast.

Where does this happen? In the desert/wilderness.

Why is this happening? It is preparing Jesus for His ministry.

How does this relate to the rest of the Gospel? Satan continues to look for opportunities to trip up and destroy Jesus.

What are the details/words that jump out at you in this passage? Possible examples: led by the Spirit, forty days, hungry, tempter, bread alone, parapet, Son of God, the test, kingdoms, prostrate, worship.

A Few More Questions to Ponder:

- Why would St. Matthew choose to include this scene of Jesus' life in his gospel? What do you think he was trying to get across to his readers?
- What character in the Old Testament do you remember fasting for forty days and nights? (Answer: Moses; see Exodus 24:18)
- What did Satan want from Jesus in exchange for "the world" in the third temptation?
- Which commandment does Jesus' third response mirror?

A Few Things to Point Out:

- Satan is trying to get Jesus to avoid suffering and/or death. Consider this in light of what Jesus says to St. Peter in **Matthew 16:23**.
- Both Jesus and Satan quote from Scripture. Just because someone quotes the Bible does not mean that they are using it to glorify God.
- The devil tries to persuade Jesus to use His power for Himself. We can never fall into that trap. Our gifts are entrusted to us for the service of the Church (see **1 Peter 4:10B**).

1. *Why did Jesus head into the desert?* The Spirit led Him there to be tempted by the devil.
2. *What does this verse mean in relation to Hebrews 4:15-16?* Because Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted and because He was sinless and perfect in the face of those temptations, we should have confidence and can approach Him for grace, mercy and help in the face of our own temptations.
3. *What does Jesus' response of quoting the Scriptures teach us?* Jesus didn't need anything else for any response to the devil ... the Scriptures say more than enough in the face of temptations. He knew them. We should know them, too.
4. *What is the only non-Scriptural response that Jesus utters to the devil? What does that teach us?* We need only claim Jesus in the face of temptation and tell the devil to flee and he will flee.

THINKING IT THROUGH

Obviously, the devil strikes at Jesus when He was at His "weakest" (i.e., hungry after fasting for forty days). The devil knows our weaknesses, our Achilles' heels, so to speak, and he stops at nothing to exploit them.

Identify what areas in your life are your weaknesses, your "entry points" for the devil to tempt you.

What can you do to eliminate them and offer them to God, in an effort to defend yourselves from the slings and arrows of the evil one?

Additional Verses:

- Ephesians 6:16
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3
- James 4:8-9
- 1 Peter 5:8

CLOSING PRAYER

Close with the St. Michael Prayer

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT JEWISH CULTURE

As we mention in the *Interesting Facts about the Holy Land* section, knowledge about the geography and culture of the Bible makes all the stories, characters, and history come to life for you, the modern reader.

Below are some random facts that you might find interesting:

- Imagine a world without cars. In biblical times, traveling by foot meant you traveled no more than fifteen miles a day, while a donkey caravan moved about twenty miles a day. A camel, however, could go more than fifty or sixty miles a day.
- There are more than 300 references to trees in the Bible. Trees were essential for shelter, building, tools, and fuel.
- Clothing was made principally of sheep's wool or cheap linen. Other fabrics, such as fine linen and silk, were also used, but they were far too expensive for the average working class Jewish family.
- As a sign of mourning, men often shaved off their beards.
- Women's perfume was made of frankincense, aloes, spikenard, and/or myrrh.
- A new "day" began at dusk. So sunrise didn't mark the new beginning of a new day, rather sunset the night before did.
- Music played an important role in the life and worship of the Jews and early Christians. Instruments discussed in Scripture include the flute, harp, lyre, shofar, trumpet, cymbals, bells, and gongs.
- Beds were little more than mats, and they were often quite coarse. Blankets or coverings were often made of goat hair, and pillows were made from goatskin and stuffed with feathers or wool.
- The Romans revolutionized travel by creating pavements and stone roadways in place of the commonly-used dirt paths.
- The "Day of Atonement" (*Yom Kippur*) was a day of mourning that is still observed by Jews. Its beginnings can be traced back to the book of Leviticus.
- There was an amazing engineering achievement created by a group called the Jebusites. They lived long before Jesus (even before King David), but they built an underground tunnel system that brought fresh water into Jerusalem from a spring below. After tapping that stream, people within the city needed only to lower their buckets for fresh water and not leave the city.
- When people put on their sandals, they always put on the right before the left. They took their sandals off in that order, too.

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LEADER'S NOTE

The New Testament was written within the culture of first-century Palestine, so it is essential for teens to understand some of the cultural idioms and practices of that period. If they do not understand something of the culture of the time, a significant portion of the biblical narrative will be lost on them. So take the time to point out and explain as many of these cultural issues as possible.

The list of bullet points on page 17 of the Student Workbook (above) explains some random facts regarding Mediterranean and early Jewish culture. There are several points that do not directly relate to the topics that are being discussed within the study, but they provide interesting conversation starters and can further whet your teens' appetites to learn more. Continually guide them back to their study Bibles, as well as to any footnotes and information you have from your own personal, ongoing biblical study. Do everything in your power to help your young people embrace the Mediterranean world as an actual place of real people who existed in "real time."

THE FAMILY TREE OF JESUS

It's important to know where you come from. It's even more important to know where you are going. The first eighteen verses of Matthew's gospel is what's called a **genealogy**, a study of "descent" tracing generation by generation up the family tree (from the roots).

Since Matthew is writing to Jews, he traces the bloodline of Jesus Christ all the way back to Abraham, the great patriarch and forefather of faith.

You might wonder what this has to do with you today or what purpose it could possibly serve to know the family tree of Jesus. You might even think, like most do, that it's really only important to know the New Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth. The better you understand the Old Testament and its characters, the more the New Testament comes to life. In turn, the more you read the New Testament, the more you'll discover the Old Testament, literally and figuratively, within its pages.

Don't just begin your experience of the gospel of Matthew with the eighteenth verse of chapter one. Take some time and read more about those in Jesus' family tree, the people listed below. I've even included book/chapter/verse for many of them, so you can see where their personal stories "began" in the Scriptures. It might surprise you to see and learn how much you have in common with Jesus. He wasn't born into a "perfect" family tree. Many of the ancestors in Jesus' line lived far less than saintly lives; that reality is truth and should give us great hope.

You know how the story "ends," with Jesus' ascension and the birth of the Church. Now, go back and see how it all began.

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham..." (Matthew 1:1)

MATTHEW 1:1-18

Abraham (Abram) - Gen. 17:5
 Isaac - Gen. 17:19
 Jacob - Gen. 29:26
 Judah and his brothers - Gen. 29:35
 Perez (by Tamar) - Gen. 38:29
 Hezron - Gen. 46:9
 Ram - 1 Chron. 2:9
 Aminadab - 1 Chron. 2:10
 Nahshon - 1 Chron. 2:10-11
 Salmon - Ruth 4:20-21
 Boaz (by Rahab) - Ruth 2:1
 Obed (by Ruth) - Ruth 4:17
 Jesse - 1 Sam. 16:1
 David the king - 1 Sam. 16:13
 Solomon (by the wife of Uriah - Bathsheba) - 2 Sam. 12:24
 Rehoboam - 1 Kgs. 11:43
 Abijah - 1 Chron. 3:10
 Asa - 1 Kgs. 15:8
 Jehoshaphat - 1 Kgs. 15:24
 Joram - 2 Kgs. 3:1
 Uzziah - 2 Kgs. 15:13
 Jotham - 2 Kgs. 15:37
 Ahaz - 2 Kgs. 15:38
 Hezekiah - 2 Kgs. 18:20
 Manasseh - 2 Kgs. 21:1
 Amos - 2 Chron. 32:20
 Josiah - 2 Kgs. 21:24
 Jehoniah (deportation to Babylon) - 1 Chron. 3:16
 Eshb. 24
 She-altiel - 1 Chron. 3:17
 Zerubbabel - Ezra 3:2
 Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob - Matt. 1:13-16
 Joseph the husband of Mary - Matt. 1:16
 Jesus was born, who is called Christ - Matt. 1:21

"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 of the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 1:18)

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LEADER'S NOTE

The "family tree" (or genealogy) of Jesus found on page 18 of the Student Workbook is obviously not the most exciting reading for your average, post-modern adolescent. It is not a topic most *adults* would read or study, either. This family tree, however, is vital to understanding Jesus' identity. Put simply, spending time Jesus' genealogy is not a waste of time. Whether or not it is successfully received by the teens depends (in large part) on how hard successful you are a leader in drawing out its relevance.

If time permits, have your teens discuss their own family trees. Have them see how far back they can trace their lineage. The most important thing that you can do is to take out the names of some of the biblical "family members" they do recognize, and spend a few moments on the chapters listed next to them. Help your young people to understand who these characters are and how their lives are similar. Even a broad stroke, cursory examination of the characters' lives will go a long way in helping them understand the imperfect family tree of Jesus; that comprehension will help them to more easily embrace the imperfections in their own family trees.

HISTORY OF THE NATIVITY "SET"

HISTORY OF THE NATIVITY "SET"

You may have a Nativity set beneath your Christmas tree or on a table inside your house. You almost certainly have one on display somewhere around your local Church. Many people don't realize that St. Francis of Assisi is credited with being the first person to "create a nativity scene", using live people and animals to bring the birth of Jesus "to life" in 1223. The coolest part of St. Francis' "living Nativity" was not the idea to do it.

Don't get me wrong, that was a creative thought, but it wasn't the most impressive insight.

What was most impressive is the fact that St. Francis used living people rather than paintings or statues in his "nativity scene." While statues, figurines and pictures are useful and effective, using humans and animals added a different, important dimension to the purpose of the nativity scene (or *crèche*, as it is known to many).

Statues, paintings and other works of art in Churches help us visualize and focus our minds in prayer. They're especially useful to those of us who have a difficult time concentrating. It's not like we worship the wood or paint, obviously; these forms and elements are just used as a tool to help us enter more deeply into prayer.¹

As you look at the Nativity scene, whether in your home or in your parish, spend time contemplating each of the "characters" or "figures" that you see within it.

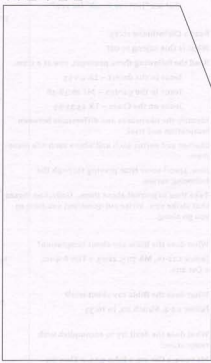
Focus on what each must have been thinking about or wondering about Jesus. Putting yourself in their shoes (well, sandals) is the first step into a deeper, richer prayer life.

- Consider what the **Blessed Virgin Mary** must have been thinking.
- Reflect on how humbled and filled with awe St. Joseph must have felt.
- Ponder how important this moment was in history, that God would send a host of angels to proclaim the event (like a proud Father would).
- Stop to reflect on what a bold statement it made inviting the **shepherds**, who were often thought of as the least popular and least desirable people in the community.

- Contemplate how far the wise men had traveled and what a significant statement they made not only with their gifts, but in their worship of the Christ.

Do you allow yourself to be a living, interactive participant in Jesus' story? Do you see yourself as part of the unfolding drama of salvation history? If not then you're probably not looking closely enough at the gospels. Don't stop with the Nativity, get back to Matthew 1-2, and encounter the source of St. Francis' inspiration.

NOTES



¹ Mark Hart, *Ask the Bible Geek 2: More Answers to Questions from Catholic Times* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2005), p. 55.

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LEADER'S NOTE

The nativity set is a great way to draw the past and the present together. It is also a great way to "bridge the gap" between cultural and ritualistic things we do as Catholics. Often teens view characters of Scripture as characters in a story. So spend some time connecting the dots for your teens between the rituals of our liturgies and in our homes and the "real people" of the Bible; the goal is to make the biblical figures relevant to their lives.

Discuss the creation and purpose of St. Francis' original nativity set (or *crèche*). Use this as a springboard to discuss how the lives of the great saints affect us today because of the things they did to bring forward the message of Christ in their time.

Ask for any other examples the teens can think of that are traditions in their home or parish, traditions such as the Jesse tree or Christmas lights. Have them lead discussions on how these rituals and practices bring more practical, tangible meaning to the Gospel.