

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 27

Matthew 1-5

This week's reflections were written by
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In Matthew we find five great blocks in which the teaching of Jesus is collected and systematized.

- a) The Sermon on the Mount, or the law of the Kingdom (chapters 5 -7)
- b) The duties of the leader of the Kingdom (10)
- c) The parables of the Kingdom (13)
- d) Greatness and forgiveness in the Kingdom (18)
- e) The coming of the King (24-25)

(William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew: The New Daily Study Bible, Vol. 1, pg 9)

Monday

Matthew 1

In Matthew's gospel, nothing is quite what it seems to be. The word 'gospel' is a new creation in Christian hands - not quite biography, not history, nor sermon, nor new report, but something new, a work describing the identity of Jesus. Yet something old too. The gospel tells of Jesus who brings the family tree to full fruition. Matthew writes to convince the Jews that Jesus is the Son of David and the Messiah which means 'anointed' in Hebrew; in Greek the word is Christos. Jesus is the Christ.

So Matthew testifies to the new beginning, or genesis God makes in Jesus. Pay special attention to the uh... colourful women listed in the genealogy: to Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Joshua 2), Ruth (Ruth 3) and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

Read about the angel's visit to Joseph and think of that other dreamer, Joseph in Genesis. Can you hear the echo and re-echo of the Holy Spirit in Genesis and Matthew? Something old, and new. Gospel.

Tuesday

Matthew 2

Here is a beloved story of light and a fearful story of blood. We sometimes forget that Jesus' birth gives the insanely suspicious Herod motivation to slaughter innocent children whose only crime is that they are roughly Jesus' age. Herod didn't want a new King of the Jews, so all of Jerusalem is frightened.

You see, there was a sense of expectation abroad: the feeling that something was about to happen. So Magi travel with symbolic gifts of gold for royalty, frankincense for worship, and myrrh for impending death. Matthew reminds us repeatedly of Jesus' identity and of the significance of Bethlehem, the house of David. When Joseph's dream tells him to flee to Egypt, we must remember the first Exodus and the slaughter of those first born Egyptian children.

Echo and re-echo to affirm Jesus as the new David, the new Moses, but who also uniquely draws Gentile foreigners to his side.

Wednesday

Matthew 3

How would you like John the Baptist as your minister? I can't imagine John at Strawberry Socials!

John whirls out of the desert preaching repentance (*metanoia*) for the forgiveness of sin with baptism as the sign. For Matthew, John is clearly the prophet Elijah returned from heaven as signpost to the coming Messiah, the King.

Using dramatic apocalyptic imagery and challenging the religious groups, John thunders about coming judgement. He introduces the Kingdom of Heaven, a phrase which will appear 32 times in Matthew's gospel.

Some wonder why Jesus submitted to baptism: maybe he felt it would fulfill his obligation to God, maybe it's a way of saying "John's right! Judgement is coming!" It was a moment of commitment when Jesus hears echoes of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 and sees the dove descending: I always think of the transfiguration in Matthew 17 when again Jesus hears God's voice.

Thursday

Matthew 4

After the high and holy moment of his baptism, Jesus experiences the wilderness testing. How often do we shift from the certainty of faith to the anxiety of fear?

Jesus must now discern what his ministry will look like and, though tempted to grasp selfish power or sensational works or compromise, Jesus deflects them all by referring to the very scriptures he has come to fulfill. (Deuteronomy 8:3, Deuteronomy 6:16, Deuteronomy 6:13) All these passages come out of the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel. Forty years for them, forty days for Jesus.

While Jesus is tempted, John is arrested by Herod. So Jesus withdraws to Galilee, thereby fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy: he will bring light to all those in darkness, including the Gentiles who surround this region like a circle. Once again see the new thing God is doing in Jesus, who now calls his first disciples.

Friday

Matthew 5

It only takes ten minutes to read this passage which Matthew calls the 'Sermon on the Mount.' He expects us to remember Moses who went up another mountain to commune with God and receive the ten commandments. Matthew reminds us that Jesus is the new Moses who dispenses a new kind of law which completely fulfills the previous Law but which pulls all listeners deeper into the new Kingdom of God.

Jesus begins with the blessings and challenges of the Beatitudes and then goes on to call his disciples to be light and salt to the world – doers, not doubters. Jesus then talks about the law taking it deeper, deeper. This 'sermon' marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry - now we hear Jesus voice with absolute clarity. It takes ten minutes to read and a lifetime to grasp.

Listen for the Word of God . . .