



# *Who Is* Jesus?

## LESSON O N E

A Series of Five  
Bible Studies Exploring  
*"The Gospel According  
to Matthew"*

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## Introduction to "Who Is Jesus?"

Many people today think they know the answer to that question. For some the answer is: "He was an enlightened moral teacher." Others say, "He was a man who led a rebellion against the restrictive religious establishment of his day." Some people even say, "He was just a man that attracted a lot of followers with his message of love and when he was killed they made up all sorts of stories about him."

What is your answer and how did you arrive at it? Have you examined the issue yourself or are you just repeating what you have been told by someone else?

To help you draw your own conclusion, we have prepared this series of lessons that will take you back to the source of our information about Jesus—the Bible. You will see what was said about Jesus by the people of His own day and what Jesus said about Himself. Although there are some who would tell you otherwise, you will see in these lessons that Jesus spoke very clearly about His identity and His purpose. In fact, His message was so clear that the religious leaders of His day finally killed Him because of it!

So, who is Jesus?

You will need a Bible to complete these lessons. They are based on the book of Matthew (the first book in the New Testament) also called the “Gospel According to Matthew.” It chronicles one of the accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. As you go through the lessons you will be asked to read the entire book of Matthew even though the lessons can only focus on specific sections.

At the end of each section there are questions to help you remember and think about what you have learned. You might want to use a separate piece of paper to record your responses—especially to those in the sections called: “Things to Consider....”

If you are puzzled or unsure about anything you read in this booklet, feel free to call Lutheran Hour Ministries at 1-800-876-9880. One of our staff would be happy to help you.

# LESSON ONE

## Introduction

Matthew was a very close friend of Jesus. He was an eyewitness of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus called Matthew to be a disciple—that is, someone who follows a teacher. Matthew has some very Good News to tell us about his teacher, Jesus. He was convinced that Jesus was the Savior whom God had promised to send. He believed that God sent this Savior so that people might be saved from sin, death, and hell by believing in Him. That's GOOD NEWS! The word "Gospel" means Good News. The book we will be studying could be called "The GOOD NEWS (or Gospel) According to Matthew."

Please note: Within this lesson are references to other Bible passages that will help you understand what Matthew has written. You might find it helpful to look up the passages and read them before continuing with the lesson. When a verse is quoted, the reference for where to find that particular verse is listed in parenthesis. It will appear as the name of the book of the Bible, the number of the chapter, and the specific verse within that chapter. For example, (Matthew 3:6) indicates that this passage can be found in the Book of Matthew, chapter 3, verse 6.

# How was Jesus Born?

(Read Chapter 1)

Matthew tells us that before Mary (the mother of Jesus) was married—before she ever had sexual relations with a man—she was found to be pregnant. This was a miracle! It took place by the power of the Holy Spirit. Although many things are impossible for man, God's powers have no limit. The Bible tells us, "*All things are possible with God*" (Mark 10:27). Look at Mary's reaction to this news in Luke 1:26-38.

But, others reacted differently! When Joseph (Mary's fiancé) found out that Mary was pregnant, he wanted to call off the wedding. But God didn't want that to happen. Verse 20 of Matthew chapter 1 tells us that an angel from God appeared to Joseph and encouraged him to go through with the marriage. The angel told Joseph that Mary had not been unfaithful to him, and that the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This baby would be the One promised by God to "*save His people from their sins.*"

The birth of Jesus had been predicted many years earlier by the prophet Isaiah (go back to the Old Testament and read Isaiah 7:14). Isaiah used the word "Immanuel" to refer to the coming Savior. That word means "God with

us.” When Jesus came to earth it really was God Himself!

### Review and Apply:

Choose either “Y” or “N” for each of the following:

1. Even though she had not had sexual relations, Mary was pregnant because God had performed a miracle through the work of the Holy Spirit. Y or N
2. When the angel came to him, Joseph thought it was a joke. Y or N
3. Jesus came to save His people from their sins. Y or N
4. Everyone who believes in Jesus is one of “His people.” Y or N

### Things To Consider...

1. Using Mary and Joseph as an example, is faith—or acceptance of God’s Word—based on “understanding”? Why or why not?
2. “Immanuel” means “God with us.” What does it mean to you that Jesus is given this title?

## Two Reactions to His Coming

(Read Chapter 2)

Many people ask, “Who is Jesus?” They may not understand Jesus but they want to learn more about Him. At the time of Jesus there were educated scholars known as “Magi,” or “wise men.” These men studied the stars and the sky (they were a mixture between our modern-day astronomers and astrologers). God placed a miraculous sign in the sky to announce Jesus’ birth. When these scholars saw it, they knew something extraordinary was happening. They traveled from a foreign country to the capital of Israel (the city of Jerusalem) to ask King Herod to tell them where they could find the new king.

Imagine Herod’s surprise to hear (from foreigners no less!) that a new king had been born. He asked his own men of learning if they could explain this and they pointed to a passage from the Old Testament (Micah 5:2) which said that the Ruler of God’s people would come from a small town called Bethlehem (only about 15 miles south of Jerusalem). Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem and asked them to let him know where the Child was to be found. He said he

wanted to “worship” the Child also—but his intention was to kill this new king.

When the wise men arrived in Bethlehem they found the baby Jesus living in a house with Mary and Joseph. They worshiped Him and gave valuable gifts to Him. As they prepared to return to Herod, they were warned by God in a dream not to go back to Jerusalem but to travel home by another route. Knowing that Herod would be angry, God sent an angel to Joseph telling him to take the Child Jesus and His mother, Mary, and go to Egypt. There they would be safe. Joseph obeyed.

Herod found out that the wise men had tricked him. He was angry. He ordered that all baby boys, two years old and younger, in the town of Bethlehem and the surrounding area, be put to death! This evil act by Herod had also been foretold by God years earlier—through the prophet Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 31:15). Many Christian churches commemorate December 28 as the day of the Holy Innocents (that is, the babies killed by Herod).

King Herod died shortly after that and Joseph was told by an angel of God to return home. He took his family to his home in Nazareth.

## Review and Apply:

Choose either “Y” or “N” for each of the following:

1. The “wise men” or “Magi” recognized that God had sent a King into the world and they wanted to worship Him. Y or N
2. King Herod also wanted to offer his worship to the Child. Y or N
3. Many of the events surrounding Jesus’ birth, including the reactions of the wise men and Herod, were foretold by God many years earlier through His prophets. Y or N

## Things to Consider...

1. Why did God choose to show foreigners that He was sending His King?
2. Did Herod believe Jesus was the Messiah or Christ? (Be careful. Look closely at what he asked his chief priests and scribes and what he did after the Magi didn’t come back.) If yes, how was Herod’s belief different from the Magi’s?

# The Ministry of Jesus Begins

(Read Chapter 3)

We don't know much about Jesus as He grew up. God guided Matthew to include in his account those things we needed to know in order to believe that Jesus is our Savior. Matthew picks up his account of the Gospel (Good News) at the River Jordan where Jesus would be baptized by John. By that time Jesus was about 30 years old. But before we can find out about Jesus' Baptism we need to hear a little about John.

The writer Luke gives us additional information about John; therefore, you might want to read Luke 1:5-25 & 57-80. John was a cousin to Jesus and God also foretold his role through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40). It was his role to prepare people for the One who would come—The Messiah—Jesus.

When Jesus came to be baptized by John, John answered that Jesus should be the one to baptize him! Jesus replied that John must baptize Him in order to fulfill all that Jesus came to do. It was like the closing of one book and the opening of another—John's ministry was ending and Jesus' was beginning. (You may wish to read more about John the Baptist's role in John 1:19-34).

As Jesus was coming out of the river after His Baptism, an incredible thing happened. The heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descended as a dove and rested on Him. A voice from heaven said, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (v. 17).

What a testimony to the people that were there that day and for us today! As Jesus began His ministry, this was a sign from God the Father, a sign showing that Jesus was the One who would open heaven, the One on whom the Lord had placed His Spirit (see Isaiah 42), and the Son of God.

### Review and Apply:

Choose the best answer:

1. John the Baptist’s message was:
  - a. The Messiah’s coming! Let’s eat, drink, and be merry!
  - b. Let’s get these roads cleaned up and prune the fruit trees! The Messiah’s coming and we don’t want to look like slobs.
  - c. Repent of your sinful ways and live your life according to God’s will. Get ready for the Messiah.

2. John did not want to baptize Jesus because:
  - a. He was the one who needed to be baptized by Jesus.
  - b. Jesus had already been baptized.
  - c. John had finished baptizing for the day and was tired.
  
3. The important point of this section in the Book of Matthew is:
  - a. Jesus was ready to begin His ministry and was attested to by the appearance of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father.
  - b. When someone wants to be baptized they should travel to Israel and wade into the Jordan River.
  - c. True Baptists will wear camel's hair and eat grasshoppers.

# Jesus Is Tempted

(Read Chapter 4:1-11)

It's a strange way to begin a ministry, but after Jesus was baptized the Spirit led Him to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The wilderness in that area is a parched wasteland of rolling hills covered with salty grit. Jesus remained there and was tempted for 40 days—without eating! We are only told of three of Satan's temptations, but the accounts in the biblical books of Mark and John state that Jesus was under attack the entire time.

The devil tempted Jesus to disobey His heavenly Father. Notice how Satan begins by calling into doubt the words the Father had spoken at His baptism: *"If You are the Son of God ..."* (v. 3). Satan had used that trick before on Adam and Eve by trying to make them doubt what God had actually said (see Genesis 3:1). He also uses it on us! Satan continuously tries to make us doubt. He likes to hit us WHEN we are weak—and WHERE we are weak! Jesus was hungry after 40 days without food, so Satan hurls a temptation regarding bread. Of course, it is not sinful to have something to eat when you are hungry, but Satan's temptation was actually for Jesus to disobey God and use His divine power to serve His own needs.

It is important for us to see how Jesus answered the devil. The apostle Peter tells us to *“be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith”* (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Jesus responded to each temptation by quoting the Word of God. Then, after foiling Satan’s attempt to get Him to fall down in worship, Jesus commanded Satan away. Jesus remained obedient to the Father and to the path that would lead to His suffering and death.

### Review and Apply:

Choose the best answer:

1. The devil tempted Jesus by:
  - a. Suggesting that Jesus eat during His fast and by promising to give Him power and wealth.
  - b. Making Him fast 40 days and nights.
  - c. Baking bread and making Jesus smell it when He was hungry.

2. Peter tells us that the devil is like:
  - a. A drunken blind man.
  - b. A pesky mosquito.
  - c. A prowling, hungry, roaring lion.
  
3. Jesus responded to Satan's temptations by:
  - a. Quoting the Word of God.
  - b. Sticking His fingers in His ears.
  - c. Running away.

### Things to Consider...

1. Why is the temptation of Jesus important to us? (You may want to look at what Hebrews 4:14-16 says about Jesus as our Great High Priest.)
  
2. What weakness in your life does Satan like to use to tempt you? Can knowing this help you to resist his temptations?
  
3. In one of his temptations, Satan quotes Scripture and tries to make something sinful appear proper—even God pleasing! Can you think of any example of this in your own life?

# Who Is This Who Speaks with Authority?

(Read Chapters 5, 6, & 7)

After the temptation, Jesus went throughout the area of Galilee in the northern part of the country of Palestine and preached and taught in the synagogues (places of Jewish worship). He also healed many people. This made Jesus very popular. People followed Him wherever He went. They came from all over the countryside and surrounding areas.

In Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7 make up what we call the Sermon on the Mount. In verses 17-20 of chapter 5, Jesus explains an important part of His work on earth. He did not come to do away with the things that God spoke in the Law and the Prophets (that's the Jewish way to refer to what we call The Old Testament). Instead, Jesus says He came to fulfill those things.

As we studied the first part of Matthew's account we saw how often he reminded us of the prophecies that were being fulfilled. Here, Jesus is also saying that He came to fulfill the Law of God. In verse 19, He says that we should not relax, disobey, or break any of God's commandments, but live according to

them and teach others to do so also. God is concerned about man's behavior and man cannot willy-nilly decide on his own what is right and wrong.

Is Jesus then saying to us that we must EARN our way to heaven by obeying God's Law? There were people in His day who thought so. Jesus called them "Scribes and Pharisees." Outwardly they acted so "holy" that others felt they must have an easy "in" with God. In verse 20, Jesus says that if someone wants to get into heaven by obeying the Law their "goodness" or "righteousness" had to outdo that of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees! The people must have thought, "Impossible! We'll never be able to be THAT good ... and that means none of us will be able to get to heaven by being 'good!'"

And that was precisely Jesus' point: NO ONE can get into the Kingdom of Heaven by trying to obey God's Law because no one can obey it perfectly. Look at the examples He gives in verses 20-48 of chapter 5. Can anyone claim to have been completely obedient to God? Only Jesus could (remember, that's what He said in verse 17). Jesus kept God's Law perfectly for us—so that we could enter the Kingdom of Heaven in His Name.

What do we do with God's Law now? And what do we do with all that Jesus says in chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Matthew? First, we know that God has given us free entrance into heaven because of Jesus Christ. Second, God loves us like His dear children. That means God's laws become the guiding words of a loving Father. We strive to be obedient in response to all He has done and because we know that His will really is the best for our lives. Jesus uses a wonderful illustration to close chapter 7. Read again what Jesus says: *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice..."* (Matthew 7:24-27).

### Review and Apply:

Choose the best answer:

1. In Matthew 4:23-25, we learn that Jesus did three important things:
  - a. Taught, preached, and healed.
  - b. Became famous, met many sick people, and went to the synagogue.
  - c. Went throughout Galilee, Syria, and Judea.

2. It was Jesus' purpose to:
  - a. Destroy, abolish, and do away with the Law and prophesy.
  - b. Fulfill the Law and the prophecy.
  - c. Learn the Law and teach the prophecy.

### Things to Consider...

1. Some translations of Matthew 5:3-10 (the Beatitudes) use the word "happy" instead of "blessed." Is "happy" the same as "blessed?" Which better fits Jesus' message? Why?
2. How would you answer someone who said, "If Jesus came and obeyed the Law for me, why can't I live any way I want?"
3. Jesus is often called the Great Peacemaker. He won peace with God, and He enables peace between people.
4. It would appear from chapters 5-7, that we are to be primarily concerned with our behavior toward others regardless of whether or not they are behaving properly toward us. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

## Conclusion

Jesus taught many things during His ministry. They were not new teachings or new laws; instead, He taught a different way to look at God's Law. Instead of simply looking at God's Law (the Ten Commandments, for example) as a list of rules to be obeyed and checked off, Jesus helps us understand that they are structures that can guide our lives in relationship with God and others. They show us where we fail and guide us to a higher goal.

People complain today that morality is absent from society. Children are not taught absolute values or morals. Jesus stresses that God has provided absolutes for living and we do well to recognize them and strive after them. Are you building your life on the shifting sands of society's values and morals or the solid rock of the words of Jesus? Your answer to the question, "Who IS Jesus?" will say a lot about your answer to this question as well.

# Answers to Questions

## How was Jesus Born?

1. *Even though she had not had sexual relations, Mary was pregnant because God had performed a miracle through the work of the Holy Spirit.* YES
2. *When the angel came to him, Joseph thought it was a joke.* NO
3. *Jesus came to save His people from their sins.* YES
4. *Everyone who believes in Jesus is one of "His people."* YES

## Two Reactions to His Coming

1. *The "wise men" or "Magi" recognized that God had sent a King into the world and they wanted to worship Him.* YES
2. *King Herod also wanted to offer his worship to the Child.* NO
3. *Many of the events surrounding Jesus' birth, including the reactions of the wise men and Herod, were foretold by God many years earlier through His prophets.* YES

## The Ministry of Jesus Begins

1. *John the Baptist's message was:*
  - c. *Repent of your sinful ways and live your life according to God's will. Get ready for the Messiah.*
2. *John did not want to baptize Jesus because:*
  - a. *He was the one who needed to be baptized by Jesus.*
3. *The important point of this section in the Book of Matthew is:*
  - a. *Jesus was ready to begin His ministry and was attested to by the appearance of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father.*

## Jesus Is Tempted

1. *The devil tempted Jesus by:*
  - a. *Suggesting that Jesus eat during His fast and by promising to give Him power and wealth.*
2. *Peter tells us that the devil is like:*
  - c. *A prowling, hungry, roaring lion.*
3. *Jesus responded to Satan's temptations by:*
  - a. *Quoting the Word of God.*

## Who Is This Who Speaks with Authority?

1. *In Matthew 4:23-25, we learn that Jesus did three important things:*
  - a. *Taught, preached, and healed.*
  
2. *It was Jesus' purpose to:*
  - b. *Fulfill the Law and the prophecy.*

