

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

THE MANGER

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Mary (Matthew 1: 18-25)

On the last Sunday of Advent the Church focuses attention on Mary who prepared for the first Christmas in a very special way. According to the traditions of both Matthew and Luke, Mary was with child from the Holy Spirit. The Gospel reading from Matthew explores the conception from Joseph's perspective and draws on the authority of the Old Testament prophecy, 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.'

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus is *the manger*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Matthew 1: 20-21; for reflection throughout the week)

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,
'Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
She will bear a son,
and you are to name him Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
your mother cared for you in a manger
because there was no room at the inn.
Help us to prepare room for you
in our hearts this Christmas time;
for you are our God,
now and always.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Matthew 1: 18-25

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Matthew 1: 18-25)

Begin to explore Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Why does Matthew focus on the birth of Jesus through the eyes of Joseph?
- How do you read Matthew's translation about 'the virgin'?
- What do you understand by Joseph's dreams?
- What is important about the names 'Jesus' and 'Emmanuel'?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Compare Matthew's account of the conception of Jesus with Luke's account.

- Luke 1: 26-38

Explore the prophecy concerning Emmanuel.

- Isaiah 7: 14

Explore the significance of Joseph for Matthew's Gospel.

- Matthew 1: 1-16 (see verse 16)

Explore the significance of dreams as God's messenger (angel) in Matthew.

- Matthew 2: 12, 13, 19, 22

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT (YEAR A) Sunday 21 December 2025

Explore the name of Jesus and the link with salvation in Luke/Acts.

- Luke 1: 31
- Luke 2: 11, 21
- Acts 4: 10-12
- Acts 5: 30-31
- Acts 13: 23, 33-38

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- What does the name Jesus mean?
- What does the name Emmanuel mean?
- Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus is *manger*. While Matthew's Gospel makes no reference to the birth in the stable (that is Luke's account), the stable and the manger have become iconic components of the nativity scene and give substance to the human birth of the Messiah. Draw on your experience of seeing the manger within the crib scene. For example:

- When have you seen the manger in crib scenes that has made an impact on you?
- What thoughts get prompted in your mind by seeing Jesus in the manger?
- How does Jesus' birth in the manger help to shape his life?

What have you learned about the image of the manger?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus or by the image of the manger.

- Create a life-size manger to display in church.
- Create a collage of crib scenes including the manger.
- Create a mural of working farmland mangers.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus or on the image of the manger,



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Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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