



the
**REAL
STORY**

This Changes Everything



EASTER 2025: THE REAL STORY

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

HOLY WEEK 2025

All four Gospel accounts tell the real story of Jesus Christ. Each Gospel writer has a particular perspective on the life of Jesus. Matthew paints an unforgettable portrait of the Kingship of Jesus in his Gospel. The Real Story is that Jesus Christ is The King of Kings and Lord of Lords! He was the most purposeful human being who has ever lived!

As King, Jesus established the Kingdom of God on earth. He invited the people of His day, and He now invites all of us to live as citizens of this new Kingdom. The work of redemption accomplished by King Jesus renders it possible for human beings to be delivered from the powers of a sin-filled earthly kingdom and join the Kingdom of God in order to live purposefully into His will.

God, through Jesus, has made it possible for us to live life as He intends. This is at the heart of human flourishing!

Matthew has painted a portrait of the King in his compelling Gospel account. Jesus is introduced on the first page of the Gospel as the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. He then provides a comprehensive record of the teachings and the example of Jesus Christ. His focus is the establishment of the Kingdom of God and subsequent life in that Kingdom. He connects the life of Jesus with the revelation of God found in the Old Testament.

Matthew also introduces tension in the narrative when he notes that Jesus plans to travel to Jerusalem and offer up His life (Matthew 16:21ff). As the story unfolds, the drama builds, and Matthew's readers become fully aware that the death of Jesus is going to be intentionally a part of The Real Story (Matthew 17:22-23). We now come to that part of the story as we begin our annual Holy Week journey.



PALM SUNDAY
JESUS THE NAZARENE
MATTHEW 21:1-11

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. Jesus gave specific instructions to His disciples to prepare for His entry into Jerusalem. Matthew draws upon prophecy from both Isaiah and Zechariah as he shares this powerful story. Jesus was born a King and now enters Jerusalem hailed as the Son of David! When people began to ask in Jerusalem about His identity, some simply responded that He was Jesus the Nazarene. After all these years ----- and for eternity ---- we all stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene!

Palm Sunday Reading: Matthew 21:1-11



HOLY MONDAY: MATTHEW 21:12-19

Matthew has provided us with a riveting account of the life, witness, teachings, miracles, and significance of Jesus Christ. We now come to the final week in the earthly life of Jesus. For centuries, Christians have referred to this week as Holy Week. We will slow down and follow Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem as the drama of this historic week unfolds.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was greeted by the masses and hailed as the Son of David. In the span of a few short days, He will be hanging on a cross on a hillside just beyond the city walls of Jerusalem. What an amazing turn of events, to say the least!

Let's begin today in prayer. Maybe a brief prayer to just prepare your heart, mind, and soul for this monumental week:

“Father, as I walk through this week, may you guide me as I follow Jesus through the streets of ancient Jerusalem. Help me to listen attentively, watch curiously, and learn in humility. May this journey this week transform me as I follow Jesus every day through the streets of my own community. Amen.”

So, here we go.

Jesus entered the Temple on Monday in Jerusalem. John's Gospel records a similar story and places it at the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus (John 2:13-25). Using this chronology of the life of Jesus, I would conclude that the event recorded by John, Jesus was prophetically proclaiming the nature of His role as Messiah. He was calling for the purification of God's people and His Temple at the beginning of His public ministry.

In our text today, from a chronological perspective, we are at the conclusion of the public Messianic ministry of Jesus. This time, the meaning underneath His actions in the Temple is different. In our text today (Matthew 21:12-19), Jesus did not merely “cleanse” the Temple—He actually rendered it useless! The “Temple Era”

was coming to a close and a new day was dawning!

His death on the cross signaled the end of the need for the sacrificial system. He was about to offer up His life as the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. Take time today to reflect upon the death of our Savior and Lord.

HOLY TUESDAY: MATTHEW 22:34-40

Matthew 22 records some of the interactions between Jesus, the crowd, and the religious authorities that happened on Tuesday of Holy Week. As you read the entire chapter, you can feel the tension mounting between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. Matthew lets us know that these leaders have insidious motives (Matthew 22: 15, 23, 34). They weren't seeking wisdom from a Master Teacher; they were trying to "trap" Him with the hopes of bringing charges against Him.

Jesus knew He was already on trial. He refused to be pulled away from His core mission. He also refused to back down from confronting the damaging effects of corrupt spiritual leadership

displayed by the authorities.

The Sadducees and Pharisees used the tactic of framing leading questions in their attempt to bait Jesus into making some type of blasphemous (according to them) claim. In the midst of this ongoing exchange, one of the legal experts asked Jesus a penetrating and potentially volatile question, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” (Matthew 22:36)

This scholar would have been well aware of the divisions ascribed to the Hebrew Law by rabbinical teachers. There were 613 laws that corresponded to the number of letters in the 10 Commandments. There were 248 affirmative precepts and 356 negative precepts. Jesus would have known these designations as a student of the Law.

The lawyer was not looking for a genuine answer. He was trying to test Jesus’s knowledge of the Law. Jesus responded by leading the crowd to give consideration to the very heart of the Law itself. He pointed everyone beyond the artificial divisions created by scholars like this lawyer and focused on the very revelation of God Himself. Love God and love each other!

That is the answer! Jesus was leading His hearers to get back to the basics of what God has always wanted from His people. God wants us to love Him first and foremost! He then wants us to love each other. The rest of the Law hinges on these two commands.

Thank you, Jesus! His message that day in Jerusalem remains relevant to us today. The truth He proclaimed on Tuesday of Holy Week has traversed time and remains true today.

Give time today to express your love to your God. Your Heavenly Father loves you. Share with Him your love for Him today. And—reflect that love in your life today as you tangibly love the people in your life. Love God! Love others!

HOLY WEDNESDAY: MATTHEW 24

Most New Testament scholars tend to agree that we don't have any clear information regarding the activities and teachings of Jesus on Wednesday of Holy Week. So, we will draw our text from Matthew's account of what occurred at the end of the day on Tuesday.

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, He shared a puzzling message regarding the Temple complex, "Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." Jesus then left "Jerusalem proper" and crossed the Kidron Vally to the Mount of Olives. His disciples followed Him, and the Temple would have been in full view from

their vantage point.

With the Temple and the Holy City as their backdrop, the disciples posed a genuine question to Jesus. “When will all this happen? What will be the signs of the end of the age?” Unlike the religious leaders, they were authentically seeking to learn from the Messiah.

Jesus answered His disciples with what scholars now call The Olivet Discourse. It is one of the 5 major sermons from Jesus (corresponding to the 5 Books of the Law). His answer was powerful and startling.

As you read today’s text, you will notice Jesus took two main threads and wove together a complex but beautiful mosaic that still causes us to marvel today. On the one hand, Jesus discussed the impending destruction of Jerusalem (one thread). This would actually occur about 40 years later when the Roman general Titus sieged Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in AD 70. As depicted in the architectural frieze on the Arch of Titus in Rome, he marched the Jewish prisoners, along with the treasures of the Jewish Temple, back to the Eternal City.

Jesus then turned his gaze beyond the dastardly work of the Roman army, and He began to describe the events surrounding the end of time (the second thread). He promised that the Son of Man would return in a dazzling display of power unequalled by any human general. He would return victoriously in power and great glory as God’s Kingdom would be finally consummated on earth.

No one knows when the end will come (Matthew 24:36). Only God possesses that information. Much will have to happen before that day. What are His followers to do until that day? Jesus said we are to “keep watch” (Matthew 24:42). In other words, we are to remain diligent and live faithfully, engaged in His Kingdom endeavors until He comes.

Just as God prepared the world for the arrival of His Son in a lowly manger in Bethlehem, He is preparing the world for the return of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a victorious and celestial processional. Until that day comes, let's be faithful to live Gospel-filled lives and proclaim His story to the nations!

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: MATTHEW 26:17-46

This day of the week received its name from the mandate (*mandatum* in Latin) given by Jesus on Thursday evening of Holy Week in John 13:34-35 where He commanded His followers to love one another. Various denominations across Christendom highlight this day with either acts of service (special offerings, food collection, etc.) or special worship services (including foot washing, communion, etc.).

Today in our reading, we encounter several significant and well-known stories from the final week in the earthly life of Jesus. On this Thursday evening, Jesus had gathered with His disciples to celebrate the Passover (Matthew 26:17-30). It was on this evening

at this celebration that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Christians have been observing this celebration ever since that fateful night.

Matthew also records the prediction shared by Jesus that He would be denied by Simon Peter (Matthew 26:31-35), and he recounts the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). These are all moving and monumental events.

In your reading today, you may be drawn to one of these stories in particular. Let the Spirit of God guide you as you reflect on the events in the life of Jesus on that final Thursday of His earthly life.

If you feel the Spirit leading you to focus on the Lord's Supper, take some time to give thanks for the willingness of our Savior to sacrifice His life for us. You may want to also read the other Gospel accounts of this event. Perhaps you might want to read the Apostle Paul's record of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32. Each time we participate in the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming the death of our Savior.

Maybe the Spirit of God is leading you to focus on the infamous denial by Simon Peter on Friday in Jerusalem. If so, take some time to reflect on the tensions within the mind and heart of Peter that led up to that fateful episode in his life. You may want to also read John 21 as you consider how Jesus restored him in an act of love and grace. Perhaps God will lead you to consider how you can remain faithful in your life and witness when you are tempted to shy away from demonstrating your allegiance to Jesus.

The excruciating experience of the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane in Matthew 26:36-46 may be where you feel led to focus today. All four Gospels record this event. You may want to take the time to read all of these accounts today. As you give attention to this interaction between Jesus and His Father, think about your own prayer life. How would you assess your

communication with God at this point in your life? How deeply are you moved to share those intimate thoughts and feelings with your Father in heaven? Is God saying something to you today about your relationship with Him.

As we read this text together today, we can sense the climactic week drawing to an end. Take a moment today and pray for your fellow church members as we travel the rest of this journey together in Holy Week.

GOOD FRIDAY: MATTHEW 27:11-66

Like every week, Thursday evening spilled over into Friday morning in Jerusalem. But *this Friday*, yes—*this Friday* would be the most significant, meaningful, eventful, cosmic Friday in all of human history.

As Matthew 26 continues, Matthew shares how Jesus was arrested, brought to the house of Caiaphas, and how Simon Peter denied Jesus. The night gave way to sunrise on Friday morning. Judas Iscariot came to grips with what he had done. We pick up the story in our reading for today.

As many times as I have read it, it is still hard to read. The

religious leaders treat Jesus like a pawn. They parade Him before the people of God and hand Him over to a pagan ruler who has no capacity to grasp the singular gravity of this moment in human history.

Pages earlier, Matthew had begun his account of the life of Jesus by connecting Him to the grand story of redemption. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, was the Son of King David, the Son of Abraham, indeed the Messiah. He ensured that his readers would be informed that Jesus was born a King when in Matthew 2 when he recorded the inquiry of the Magi, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”

Now we come to Friday, *Good Friday*. The Roman procurator Pontius Pilate asked the famous question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Pilate’s wife sent a message to her husband and warned him to remove himself from the conversation about the Nazarene. She had been troubled in her dreams. Pilate seemed to realize that the Jewish leaders were up to something as well. However, he eventually relented and handed Jesus over to be crucified, thus etching the name Pontius Pilate in the annals of infamy.

Then, Matthew walks us through the streets of Jerusalem to the hill known as Golgotha. There, on that fateful Friday, the Son of Abraham, the Son of King David, the Son of Mary, the Son of Man—indeed, the Son of God was crucified.

Today we pause, we join hands with Christians across the world and across time, and we stand at the foot of the cross. Our Savior was nailed to the cross. For us. All of us. Above His sacred head now wounded read, THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

We give thanks on this Good Friday for our King.

SILENT SATURDAY

Today, we wait in silence.



EASTER SUNDAY

HE IS NOT HERE, HE HAS RISEN!

MATTHEW 28:1-15

Praise God! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Matthew's Gospel opens with a genealogy that includes the names of various women. He now closes His Gospel with the first appearance of the resurrected Lord reserved for women! They become the first evangelists of the resurrection. The disciples receive the testimony. Jesus is alive! Forever! *Everything has changed!*

Lenten Season Weekly Reading: Matthew 28

HOLY WEEK - HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

All four Gospel writers recount the events of the final week in the earthly life of Jesus. This Harmony of the Gospels places the four accounts alongside each other for easy reference. You may want to take the time to read each writer's perspective on these final days in the life of Jesus.

PALM SUNDAY

*Royal, Triumphant
Entry into Jerusalem*

Matthew 21:1-11

Mark 11:1-11

Luke 19:28-44

John 12:12-19

MAUNDY THURSDAY

*The mandate
"Love one another"*

Matthew 26:17-26:46

Mark 14:12-42

Luke 22:7-46

John 13:1-18:1

MONDAY

*Jesus signals the
end of the Temple*

Matthew 21:12-19

Mark 11:12-19

Luke 19:45-48

John 12:20-50

GOOD FRIDAY

The Lamb of God

Matthew 26:47-27:66

Mark 14:43-15:47

Luke 22:47-23:56

John 18:2-19:42

TUESDAY

Jesus in the Temple

Matthew 21:23-26:16

Mark 11:19-14:11

Luke 20:1-22:6

EASTER SUNDAY

HE IS RISEN!

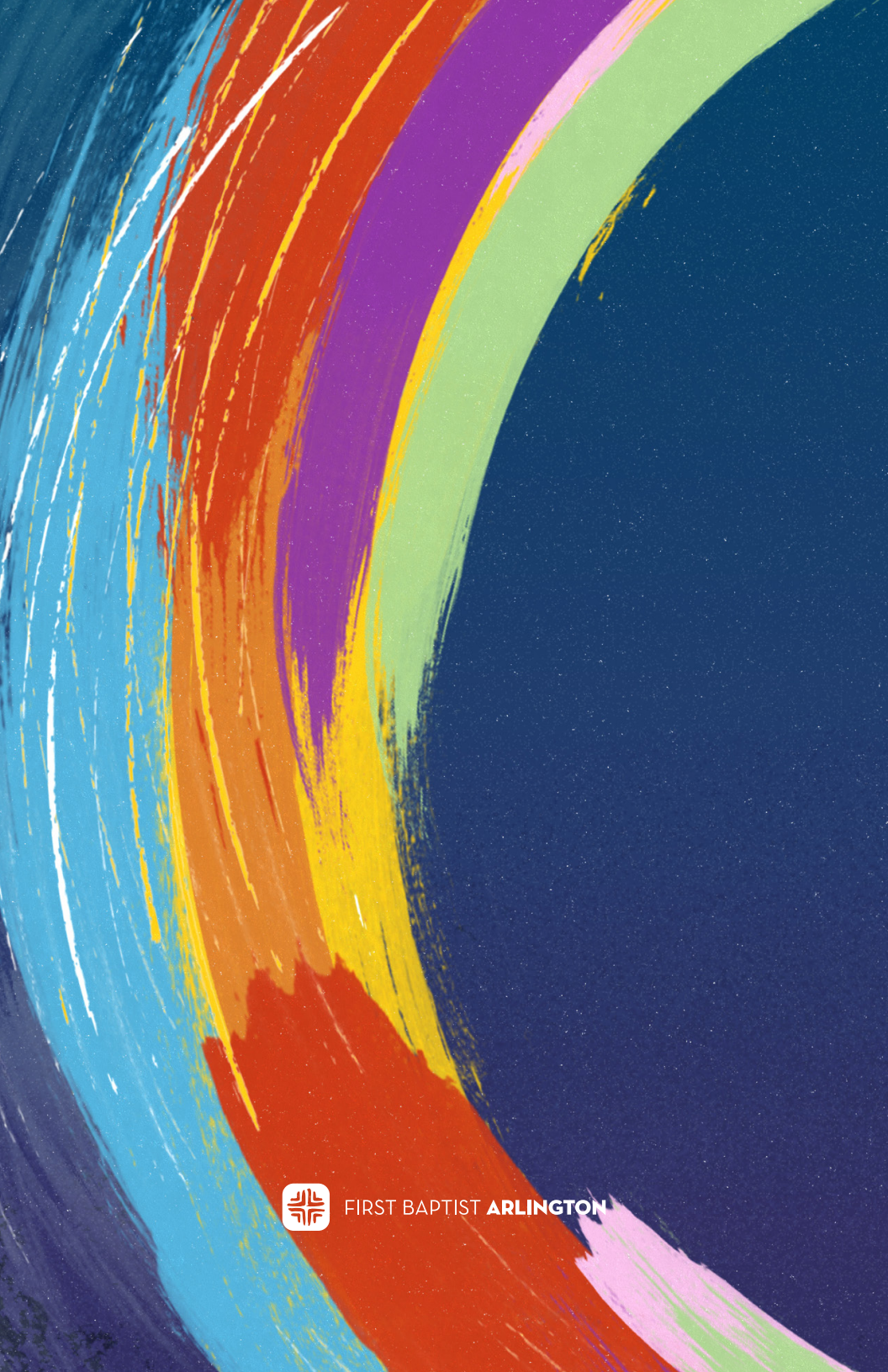
Matthew 28:1-15

Mark 16:1-8

Luke 21:1-49

John 20:1-23





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