



# **FOCUS ON MATTHEW**

**a study guide for  
groups & individuals**

revised edition

**by  
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# Introduction to the Focus Series

The Focus Bible Study Series offers a unique and inviting way to interact with and experience God's word, allowing that word to filter into every area of life. It is designed to challenge growing Christians to explore scripture and expand their understanding of God's call. Each volume echoes the **Living the Good News** strategy of experiential learning; that is, they welcome the participant into a journey of discovery.

## Journal Format

Focus Bibles Studies are adaptable for individual use or group use. Adult classes, small-faith communities, midweek Bible studies and neighborhood discussion groups will find these books a helpful resource for in-depth exploration, personal growth and community building. When used in a group, leadership may be designated or shared.

Each of the book's twelve sections begins with a brief synopsis of the passage and a *Find the Facts* section, which can help you prepare to consider the material. Informative commentary is not intended to provide definitive answers to the meaning of the passage, but to give you background information, clues to the context and suggestions for thought. It can serve as a point of departure for personal reflection or group discussion.

The questions posed in each section are designed to speak to at a variety of levels:

- Some are questions of *interpretation*: What is the author's meaning in this passage?
- Some are questions of *application*: How does the author's message apply to contemporary Christianity?
- Some are questions of *reflection*: How is this God's message to me? to my family? to our community?

Every level contributes to the faith-nurturing impact of the study. The variety of questions are grouped together topically so that you can respond to the level most directly pertaining to your situation. The same goes for group use: participants can respond to those questions most relevant to their current circumstance.

Each section includes suggested *Group Activities*. These activities provide small groups with experiential activities that can help participants to grasp an idea through various methods of learning rather than through intellect alone. These activities involve the whole person—senses, emotions, mind and spirit. If you are using this study in a group setting, we encourage you to incorporate these activities into your group’s time together. Many adults may feel awkward when invited to work with clay or pipe cleaners, or to create songs or poetry; they may feel these are childish activities. Such concrete experiences, however, can serve to move group members from learning *about* an idea toward an *understanding* of the idea.

Each section closes with a *Journal Meditation* and a *Stepstone to Prayer*. These offer you the opportunity to record or illustrate thoughts and feelings about the passage explored and to express these to God in prayer. The *Journal Meditation* invites you into deep, personal reflection that can produce life-changing understanding. *Stepstone to Prayer* leads you into a time of communion with God.

## Individual Use

- Begin each session with prayer—that you will be open to God’s message to you, that the Spirit will illuminate God’s work, and that you will be empowered to follow God’s call.
- Read the passage several times in the scripture translation of your choice. (Note that the New Revised Standard Version Bible has been used in the preparation of these studies.) Try to understand what the author is saying before you begin to interpret, apply or reflect on the message.
- Note key words or phrases that you find especially significant in the scripture. When you have finished a section, go back and review these words or phrases and explore their importance in light of your greater understanding of the passage.
- Spread your exploration of any given section over several days; come back to those questions that have provoked considerable thought. You may be surprised at the new insights you find if you spend some time each day on the passage. Give the passage time to sink into your heart and mind.
- Record your thoughts in the space provided. The discipline of journaling can help you synthesize your thoughts and direct your understanding.

## Small Group Use

- Prepare for each gathering following the suggestions given above under “Individual Use.” Group interaction is impoverished if participants have not immersed themselves in the passage before meeting.
- Begin your time together with prayer. Expect God to increase your faith, expand your understanding of scripture and build your fellowship.
- Accept one another’s experiences and interpretations of the passage. Listen carefully to comments; offer your own insights; be willing to look at things in new ways.

## Small Group Leadership

- Prepare for each gathering as a participant first. Your role as a leader is not to teach but to facilitate the process of sharing and discovery for everyone.
- Keep in mind the group’s time restraints. Begin and end on time. Underline those questions that you think will be most appropriate for your group’s discussion time, but be open to those questions that group members wish to pursue.
- Choose one or two group activities that your group will enjoy and learn from. Make sure you have gathered any required materials for your chosen group activities.
- Begin and close each gathering with prayer. Ask a volunteer to read each section of the passage as you come to it in the study.
- Welcome all contributions, but keep the discussion on track. Certain passages may have two or three possible interpretations. Do not be concerned if all participants do not agree in their understanding. Acknowledge the differences of opinion and move on to the next question.
- Allow time at the end of each gathering for those individuals who wish to share their thoughts or drawings from their *Journal Meditations*.
- If your group members are not well-acquainted, it may take some time to build a trust level within the group. Let the dynamics of the group develop as group members gain confidence in themselves and in one another.





# Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew

Reading and studying the Gospel of Matthew launches us on a voyage into “good news.” *Gospel*, from the Greek word *evangelion*, literally means good news. By the third century, the four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, had become known as “evangelists,” bearers of the good news.

From the moment that the two Marys rushed away from Jesus’ empty tomb to tell the other disciples the good news, people have continued to share the story. The women told their friends; the friends announced it to gathered groups. Word spread and, as believers banded together to build their lives on the good news of Jesus, the Church grew.

Over time the stories of Jesus crystallized, achieving some stability in the details included and the words used as Christians told and retold them. Eventually Jesus’ followers wrote down these stories. People collected them and put them together to form cohesive written accounts of the heart of the good news—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

The four gospel writers do not present the story of Jesus in the same way. Each reflects a unique viewpoint. Each presents a different order of events in Jesus’ life. Each uses the materials available to him to address the needs and concerns of his special audience. All, however, proclaim the same good news.

The gospels do not report “news” in the sense of a newspaper story written to give a precise account of events. Instead, we must dig to establish the “who, what, where, when, why and how” of these ancient writings. We then discover the central purpose of each gospel writer: to testify to the incredible good news—the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus—and its implications for humanity.

## Date and Authorship

Part of the long debate over the authorship of Matthew hinges on the similarities seen in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Clearly, the similarities are strong enough to suggest

that all three books are linked to common sources. Matthew has included most of Mark, though the stories are shortened to leave room for Matthew's original material, consisting mainly of Jesus' teachings.

Tradition assumes that the book was authored by the apostle of the same name, Matthew the tax collector, mentioned in Matthew 9:9 and 10:3. This hypothesis, however, fails to explain why Matthew, an apostolic author, would rely so much on Mark, who was a non-apostolic author. Why would Matthew not rely on his own, firsthand remembrances?

Another theory suggests that the original material found in Matthew may have been the written reflections of the apostle Matthew, recorded originally in Aramaic, a Jewish dialect. A later unknown compiler may then have combined the writings with the stories found in the Gospel of Mark to create a new gospel written in Greek. Matthew's name would be associated with this new gospel because his Aramaic writings provided a portion of the text as well as its overall viewpoint.

Whatever position one holds, it seem unlikely that the apostle Matthew actually wrote the original Greek document that we now know as the Gospel of Matthew. Presumably, however, some of the apostle's personal experiences and memories of Jesus' ministry live on in the book we are about to study. In this study the name Matthew refers to Matthew, the Evangelist.

The dating of Matthew is equally difficult. Some scholars choose a date as early as A.D. 60, some as late as A.D. 90–95. Many are comfortable with a date sometime between A.D. 70 and A.D. 80. It is safe to say the Greek Gospel of Matthew, the translation of which we use today, probably appeared about forty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

## Setting

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple of the Romans in A.D. 70 triggered a crisis for the Jewish people of Matthew's time. The Jewish religious community suddenly found itself fighting for its existence, and in that fight, returning to a Jewish orthodoxy that, in its homogeneity, offered a better chance of spiritual survival. Such orthodoxy, however, tolerated much less diversity, and the Christian Jews found themselves no longer accepted as a Jewish sect. They stood separated from their previous Jewish identity. The temple crisis ended an era for Judaism and aggravated the polarization of Christians and Jews.

For Jewish Christians, the destruction of the temple and the threat to Judaism also threat-

ened their continuity with their sacred past. For them Jesus was the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. If Judaism could crumble, what did that mean for the Messiah? Their own roots seemed uncertain.

So Matthew writes for a people in transition, for a Church with an uncertain future. He wants to offer continuity with the past and confidence for the future. He writes to show the Jewish Christians that their true link to the past rests, not in the traditional structures of Judaism, which seem to be passing, but in the great promise of Judaism: the coming of the Messiah.

Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees figure prominently in Matthew's gospel. Scribes could read and write Hebrew and, as successors to the prophets and sages, specialized in religious questions. They guarded the written tradition carefully, resulting in a legalistic perspective with a tendency to restrict knowledge to the initiated (Mt. 7:29; 23:23).

The Sadducees represented the aristocracy and the priesthood. Prior to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, they dominated the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish governing body. But the Sanhedrin was abolished when the temple was destroyed, and following A.D. 70 the Sadducees rapidly lost power. The Sadducees believed that only the written Torah, the first five books of the Bible, was binding for the Jewish people.

The Pharisees, by contrast, believed that all of the Jewish law was binding for the Jews. Devoted to the law and its interpretation, the Pharisees resented Jesus who spoke on his own authority. Matthew portrays them as Jesus' chief opponents, which may reflect Matthew's experience of the growing hostility between Christians and Jews after A.D. 70. The Pharisees may also have been angered by how closely much of Jesus' teaching followed their own, while at many points it soundly condemned their hypocrisy (Mt. 23:3).

## Major Themes

Matthew's gospel reveals Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew designs his gospel to teach and guide the Jewish Christian church of his time. Interestingly, of the four gospel writers, only Matthew uses the Greek word *ekklesia* (church); Matthew offers guidance for the worship, ethics and missionary activity of the Church.

In spite of Matthew's essential Jewishness, his gospel stresses the universal mission of Christ. Jesus comes not only as the Jewish Messiah, but as the Messiah for all people.

Matthew writes to convince his Jewish readers of the legitimacy of Jesus' messiahship in the light of the Old Testament and to assure his Jewish Christian readers that belief in Jesus did not mean that they were abandoning true faith, but rather that they were accepting its fulfillment. The events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection stand solidly as part of God's dealings with people throughout time, dealings that continue as a reality in our lives today. Just as many Jewish believers needed to hear again that God is the God of all people, so we today need to remember that God's kingdom extends far beyond our familiar cultural limits to all the world.

## Structure

The arrangement of Matthew's material reflects the work of a skilled author whose careful combination of stories and teachings communicates the book's themes. The Gospel of Matthew divides easily into three parts:

- first, an introduction (chaps. 1–2)
- second, the body, which tells of Jesus' ministry (chaps. 3–25)
- third, the conclusion, telling of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the commissioning of the disciples (chaps. 26–28)

The body (chaps. 3–25) subdivides into five sections, each containing a narrative (story) portion and a discourse (teaching) portion. Matthew uses a formula (or some variation of it) to end each of these sections: "Now when Jesus had finished saying these things..." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

The teaching of Jesus stands centrally in Matthew's gospel. Through this teaching, the Church finds practical guidelines for life and worship. Fittingly, Matthew concludes the gospel with the challenge of the great commission, the Church's task for the present and future.

# Matthew 1–4

## The Coming of the Messiah

**O**ur first study in Matthew covers several major events: Jesus' birth, his baptism, his temptation and the beginning of his ministry. Though we may wish for more biographical details, Matthew's intent is to present the Messiah; he thus devotes most of the book to Jesus' ministry and message. Read the first four chapters of Matthew, watching for hints of important themes:

- Jesus as Messiah
- the fulfillment of God's purpose in history
- Jesus as the Messiah to both Jews and non-Jews
- Jesus in conflict with religious leaders
- Jesus and the message of the kingdom

### Find The Facts

Who is the main character? How is he introduced? Where is he born? How does he get to Nazareth? What is the first recorded event of his adult life? What happens to Jesus in the wilderness? When and where does he begin to preach? Who are the first disciples? What are the major aspects of Jesus' ministry?

## Consider:

1. Make a simple outline of the important segments of the first four chapters of Matthew. Give titles to the various sections.
2. What is important about the birth of Jesus according to Matthew? What seems most significant about the visit of the wise men from the East?
3. What role does John the Baptist play? Describe his personality. Why do you think he became so popular with the people?

4. What events prepare Jesus for his ministry? In what way does each event add to Jesus' understanding of his calling?

## Matthew 1:1-25

Before launching into the main body of his work, the story of Jesus' public ministry and teaching, Matthew sets the scene by describing the background and birth of Jesus. Matthew establishes Jesus' credentials by identifying Jesus both theologically and genealogically in the first verse. He introduces Jesus as the Christ (Heb. *Messiah*) and traces his family tree back through David, the king from whose line the Messiah was expected, to Abraham, the traditional father of the nation of Israel (Gen. 12:2-3).

Matthew's inclusion of this genealogy tells us at the outset that he sees Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises as recorded in the Old Testament.

The modern mind can have some difficulties when faced with the failure of the names to agree with the Old Testament or with the genealogy of Jesus as recorded by Luke (Lk. 3:23-38), but historical accuracy is not the point. Common practice allowed the telescoping of genealogies to achieve a desired effect. Luke's genealogy is traditionally considered to reflect Mary's ancestry, not Joseph's. Matthew includes the genealogical information as testimony to his faith that all of history, beginning with the patriarch Abraham, has culminated in the fulfillment of God's purpose in the person of Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah. The status of Jesus as the legal son of Joseph, a descendant of David, is more important to Matthew than the virgin birth. Neither the

conception nor the birth are recounted here, only their consequences.

Matthew declares that the birth of Jesus is no ordinary affair and he again stresses the connection to Old Testament prophecy (1:18-25; Is. 7:14). God is now with us.

Matthew tells this story from the point of view of Joseph, a just and obedient man (1:19, 24). Though distressed by his betrothed's pregnancy, he plans to divorce her quietly without bringing charges that could lead to a death sentence. The name *Jesus* (1:21, 25), the Greek form of *Joshua*, was common; the name means Savior or "Yahweh saves." Note that Matthew, interested in making clear the identity of Jesus, includes this information and prepares the reader for the climax of the story.

## Consider:

5. Why is Matthew so careful to provide Jesus with impeccable credentials? What would the relationship to David and to Abraham have meant to Matthew's Jewish audience? What does viewing God as active and intentional in human history mean to us today?



6. In contrast to the account in Luke 1:26-38, which focuses on Mary, Matthew's account of the events leading up to Jesus' birth focuses on Joseph's reactions. In what ways can you identify with Joseph's dilemma? What do you think enabled him to respond with obedience in what must have been a somewhat disturbing situation? What helps you continue in faith when the facts seem contradictory?

7. What does it mean to "save his people from their sins"? Who are his people? In what sense do you think of Jesus as Savior?

## **Matthew 2:1-12**

Chapter 2 continues with signs of Jesus' identity as the Messiah. The New Revised Standard Version translates the word *magi* as "wise men," but the term means something more like "astrologers." Magi believed that a star would announce the arrival of a great human being.

As the only gospel that tells the story of the visit of the magi, Matthew makes a special point by including the story. Over time, Jews had come to identify the star “out of Jacob” with the anticipated Messiah (Num. 24:17). Again Matthew insists that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Mic. 5:2). There seem to be two other major points:

- The birth of Jesus is a cosmic event (signified by the star).
- The birth is important not only for Jews but for all people. (See Mt. 28:19.) Non-Jews, the magi, come to worship Jesus at the very beginning; today the Church celebrates this event as the feast of the Epiphany.

The birth also has political implications; Herod is troubled by the news (2:3). (Herod the Great ruled in Palestine until his death in 4 B.C.) We can imagine he was even more distressed when the chief scribes and priests found a prophecy to confirm the magi’s story. Verse 2:6 quotes Micah 5:2. The gifts of the magi (2:11) are royal gifts traditionally interpreted as gold for the King, incense for God, and myrrh for the One who is to die. Myrrh is the resin of an Arabian shrub and produces a pleasant aroma. The magi prove themselves to be wise indeed when they decide to return home by another way (2:12). Note that this is the second time that a dream is important in Matthew (1:20).

## Consider:

8. When you think today of the birth of Jesus, in what ways does it have cosmic implications? universal implications? political implications? How can you relate these to your own life?

9. As the star directed the magi, what directs you to Jesus? What gifts would you like to offer to Jesus? What do they symbolize?

## Matthew 2:13-23

This section describes more events that Matthew interprets in the light of Old Testament prophecies. Note the repetition of the formula, “this was to fulfill...” Verse 15 quotes from Hosea 11:1; verses 17-18 from Jeremiah 31:15; the reference in verse 23 is uncertain. Connecting these events in Jesus’ life to the Old Testament presents Matthew’s view that Jesus does not stand alone as an isolated phenomenon, but rather that Jesus is the completion of a story begun long ago.

Matthew consistently portrays Joseph as faithful and obedient. Three more times the angel of the Lord (an Old Testament phrase for God in visible form) appears to him in a dream (2:13, 19, 22) and gives a command that Joseph follows exactly. God continues to guide the course of events through obedient believers.

This section presents a stark contrast to the preceding material; the divine child, just presented with royal gifts, is forced to flee for his life. Scholars often point out parallels between the story of Israel and Matthew’s story of Jesus. Joseph is instructed to go to Egypt, the traditional place of refuge (1 Kg. 11:40). Besides foreshadowing the persecution and rejection that Jesus was to encounter as an adult, the story is reminiscent of Moses, Israel’s great deliverer. Set adrift on the Nile as an infant in order to elude a king’s persecution, Moses later escaped and returned to lead his people.

## Consider:

10. Why do you think Matthew is anxious to explain the events of Jesus' life in light of the Old Testament? Is this a useful way today for us to understand scripture? Why or why not?
11. Matthew reports that the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph through dreams. In what ways do we receive messages from God today? Who are the messengers? How can we identify them?
12. What do you think is significant about the several moves that Jesus' family makes during his infancy and early childhood? In your own life, what influence has your hometown had on your lifestyle and values?

## Matthew 3:1-17

Time passes, perhaps twenty-five years, between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. To set the scene for the beginning of the Messiah's adult ministry, Matthew introduces a colorful new character, John the Baptist. Dressed as a desert bedouin (3:4), John preaches a dramatic message of repentance (3:2) and heralds the coming of a mightier one (3:11). John the Baptist paves the way for the Christian message of salvation.

John preaches in the wilderness of Judea (3:1), the mountainous region west of the Dead Sea. Here people gathered to hear the strange new prophet. Many accept his message and are baptized. "Repent" (Gk. "change your mind," Heb. "turn back, change direction") calls the people to come back to the covenant between God and Israel (Ex. 19:3-6). If God's kingdom is "at hand," all God's past activities are coming to fruition. John's baptism is clearly understood as a cleansing, a washing away of sins, but the baptism of the One who is to come is different (3:11). With the advent of Jesus, baptism by water becomes a sign of baptism with the Holy Spirit, the receiving of God's unconditional love. In verses 7-12, John addresses the Pharisees and Sadducees (see Introduction) and accuses them of self-righteousness ill befitting religious leaders. This "brood of vipers" ultimately sees that Jesus is crucified.

Jesus' own baptism takes place after John overcomes an initial reluctance to baptize him. Jesus emerges from the water with a dramatic and powerful new sense of affirmation and self-understanding. Matthew describes a visible event as well: the Spirit of God descends like a dove (for rabbis, a symbol of Israel) and plainly identifies Jesus as the Messiah, "beloved" (meaning also "chosen one").

## Consider:

13. Repentance involves a change of direction. Of what do we need to repent in the Church today? What new directions would lead us into deeper understanding of Jesus the Messiah? In your own life, where do you need to change direction?
  
14. John the Baptist accuses the Jewish leaders of hypocrisy and says their actions do not bear fruit. How might his words have affected the Jewish leadership? the developing Christian Church? What are the dangers of smugness or self-righteousness for church leaders today? for any of us who close our minds and hearts to new ideas?
  
15. If baptism washes away sins, why do you think Jesus wants to be baptized? In what ways do you think it was “fitting” for Jesus to be baptized? What was the result of Jesus’ baptism? In what ways did it equip him for ministry?

## Matthew 4:1-11

Immediately after the powerful experience of his baptism, Jesus withdraws into the wilderness to be alone for forty days and forty nights, presumably to reflect on what it means to be the beloved Son of God.

The time Jesus spends in the wilderness parallels Israel's wandering in the wilderness (Num. 14:33-34). To Matthew's Jewish audience this would also recall the receiving of the Ten Commandments by Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:28) and the receiving of a revelation by Elijah on Mount Horeb (1 Kg. 19:8).

The devil (4:1), the tempter (4:3) and Satan (4:10) are names for the leader of evil forces actively hostile to God. Three temptations follow, each associated with power and each rejected by Jesus with a quotation from Deuteronomy. The first (4:3) may reflect the current belief that the messianic age would bring a miraculous abundance of material goods. Jesus, though hungry, rejects this simple solution to satisfying physical needs (Dt. 8:3).

In 4:5, the devil suggests an even more dramatic way for Jesus to prove he is the Son of God. Cleverly, since Jesus refutes the first suggestion by quoting scripture, the devil in verse 6 quotes Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus also rejects this scheme for impressing people (4:7), again with a quote from scripture (Dt. 6:16). Undaunted, the devil offers political power (4:8). Once again Jesus rejects the easy route to power, certain now of his mission to proclaim a different sort of kingdom, a different sort of power.

## Consider:

16. What words in this passage link the three temptations to the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism? On what resources does Jesus rely when rejecting power as a way to prove that he is the Son of God? On what resources do you rely when you need to resist a powerful temptation?
17. Why do you think Jesus felt a need to be alone after the experience of baptism? What questions might he have been asking himself? What questions do you have about the nature of your own ministry?



## Matthew 4:12-25

The last half of chapter 4 records the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. When he returns from the wilderness he learns that John the Baptist has been arrested (4:12); this news reinforces the theme of unrest and danger that accompanies Jesus' career.

Once again Jesus is on the move; he leaves Nazareth and goes into Galilee, a move Matthew interprets as fulfillment of another prophecy (vv. 15-16 quote Is. 9:1). John's arrest evidently signals Jesus to begin his own preaching (4:17). In verses 18-22 he calls the first of the disciples. For Peter, Andrew, James and John "repentance" means literally turning around or taking a new direction. They leave their fishing nets and follow Jesus.

Verses 23-25 serve as an introduction and summary for the next section of the book of Matthew. Chapters 5-9 will describe in detail Jesus' teaching, preaching and healing, a similar summary appearing in 9:35.

### Consider:

18. How do the primary activities of Jesus—teaching, preaching and healing—differ from the activities he rejects in 4:1-11? What are the primary activities of ministry today? In what ways are preaching, teaching and healing still good categories for ministry? How would you describe your own ministry as a baptized Christian?

19. What is involved in the response of Peter, Andrew, James and John to Jesus' call? In what ways do we respond to Jesus' call today? What are some characteristics of one who follows Jesus?

## Group Activities

1. Many families today enjoy researching their ancestry and constructing a family tree. Often a family has a coat of arms that shows symbols depicting the history of its name.

Divide into groups of three or four. Distribute large sheets of paper and various colored markers. Ask each group to design a coat of arms for Jesus by selecting three or four symbols from Matthew's description of Jesus' background and birth.

Ask the small groups to share their artwork and explain their choices to the whole group.

2. Invite the group to brainstorm answers to this question:
  - Who are the wise people of today (that is, those who are aware of "God with us" in the world)?

Record the group's ideas on newsprint, then discuss:

- What are the characteristics of these wise people? (*for example, willing to risk, searching for truth, open to new signs or information, etc.*)
  - Where are they found?
  - How do we recognize them?
3. Invite group members to participate in a roleplay of the calling of the disciples. Assign parts for *Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James, John* and *Zebedee*, giving participants a few minutes to get into character. Ask someone else to describe the setting. Suggest that the observers think about what is involved in the call to discipleship.

After the roleplay, ask the *disciples*:

- How did your part in the roleplay feel?
- What were some of your thoughts?
- Did you want to drop everything and go? Why or why not?
- Was it a hard or easy decision?

Ask *Jesus*:

- How did it feel to play your part?
- What were your expectations? Did you expect the disciples to follow you right away? Why or why not?

Ask *Zebedee*:

- How did it feel to play your part?
- What did you think about your sons taking off and leaving you? Why didn't you go, too?

Ask *observers*:

- What insights about the call to discipleship did you have while you watched the roleplay?

## Journal Meditation

In many ways verse 1:23 is the heart of Matthew's gospel. Though the quotation (Is. 7:14) speaks of a birth in the time of King Ahaz, for Matthew salvation is just this: God with us. Jesus, Messiah and Savior (1:21), brings this to pass once and for all. Reflect quietly for a few minutes on the meaning of "Emmanuel" for you. Make a list or draw a picture of ways in which you understand God to be with you.

### Stepstone To Prayer

God, help me to be aware that you are with me.