



# First Lutheran Church

## Gospel of Matthew

### Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



**Devotion Time:**  
*It's Christmas*

Week 1: Matthew chapters 1 and 2

Opening Prayer

God of the heavens, you called Joseph to parent your Son here on earth, and Joseph responded with obedience to your call. May we have the faith of Joseph and see our role in treating every person as if they bear the sign of your Son in them with the same obedience to your call as Joseph. In your holy name we pray. Amen

The Christmas nativity is filled with lots of figurines. Joseph is there, naturally, as he is the father of Jesus. Scripture does not give us any biographical information about Joseph. Any image we have of him being an older, gentle man comes from post-biblical tradition. Joseph is also sometimes thought of as a widower, someone who had children from a previous wife who must have died, again for reasons that only come from post-biblical sources.

So pause for a moment. Let go of previous assumptions about Joseph. Do not worry about his age, his previous relationship statuses, how he came to be engaged with Mary. Just pause for a moment and consider the role of a new father. How is Joseph feeling about becoming a father?

Now consider Joseph is being told the child is not only not his, but is God's child. What extra emotions or concerns do you think Joseph was feeling?

What does the expression "do not be afraid" (Mt. 1:20) offer to Joseph in accepting his role with Mary in parenting Jesus?

We are assigned lots of parenting roles in our life, from our own children, to the friends of our children, to students we teach, to youth at our church, to the youth that we coach or mentor. Can you name a youth, who is not your own child, but who you consider a "child" in your care?

How did you come to see yourself in that parental role with this youth? What emotions came with the realization you were in a parenting role with this youth?

How does the story of Jesus remind us to see every person as bearing the image of God?

How do we treat all others, not just our children or our "other children", as if they are "Immanuel, God With Us"?

Build a Nativity

Christmas is 6 months away. But pull out your nativity scene and set the stable without the figures.

Read Matthew 1:18 - 2:12.

Place the figures as they appear in the story into the stable.

Who is left in the box? Who in this story is not in the box? How should we represent those not found in our nativity scenes?

Bonus: Put all the figurines away. Next read Luke 1:26-2:40.

Again, place figures as they appear in the story. Who is left in the box? Who is not represented with a figurine in the box? How should we represent these characters at our nativity scenes?

Take note how different Matthew and Luke tell the story of Christmas

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

First Lutheran Church \* 116 South B Street \* Monmouth, IL 61462  
309-734-2106 \* office@flcmonmouth.org \* www.flcmonmouth.org  
Pastor Jamie Gallagher \* prjamie@flcmonmouth.org