

To Provide the Opportunity of Adoption

“The Child in the Manger – The True Meaning of Christmas” – Part I

Matthew 1:1-25

December 3, 2017

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² *Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.*

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, ¹ and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² *And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.*

¹⁷ *So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.*

¹⁸ *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

²³ *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”*

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:1-25 (ESV)

For several years now during the Christmas season, upon entering the city of Glasgow, Scotland, has hung a banner from the Lord Provost of a city which is like most of Scotland today. While once a so called Christian nation, where the vast majority claimed to be Christians, it is now a mostly secular nation, where Christians are in the minority and regular church attendance is

somewhere around 8%. The position of Lord Provost in Scotland is equivalent to that of the mayor of a city or a town in the United States. This is what the banner from the Lord Provost entering Glasgow reads:

“May I take this opportunity to wish Happy [Merry] Christmas and a Peaceful and Prosperous New Year to all citizens and visitors alike. I hope and pray that the true meaning of Christmas will be in everybody’s minds and hearts at this particular time of year.”

Scotland, as well as England and most of Europe seem to be leading the way for the U.S. in becoming what was once a Christian nation to a non-Christian nation. The same banner that hangs over Glasgow, Scotland could just as well apply to us today in the U.S.

What really is the true meaning of Christmas? How many people in America today understand the true meaning of Christmas? If we were to ask children in America today what the true meaning of Christmas is, what would they say?

- Santa Claus
- About getting and giving presents
- Christmas lights and decorations
- Getting together with family and friends

Or children are often more perceptive than we think. They might say, “it’s the time of year when things get really busy!” Or they might say, “it’s the time of year when there is a lot of running around.” Or they might even say, “it’s the time of year when Mom and Dad get really stressed out!”

Our celebration of Christmas in America, even for most Christians, is a mixture of the secular and the divine, at best! What is the true meaning of Christmas? That is what we hope to discover in our Advent and Christmas series this year, entitled “The Child in the Manger, the True Meaning of Christmas.”

Our Scripture passage this morning is from the very beginning of the New Testament, from the Gospel of Matthew. It begins with *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*. The literal reading in Greek is “The Book of the genesis of Jesus Christ.”

Matthew is the “Genesis” of the New Testament.// Just as Genesis, the first book in the Old Testament, open with the actions of God bringing about the beginnings of the entire universe – the heavens and the earth – culminating in the creation of humankind (beginning with Adam & Eve), Matthew, the first book of the New Testament opens with the actions of God that eventually bring about the birth of Jesus Christ.

If there is any doubt that any of this was by chance, the writer of the Gospel of Matthew tries to eliminate that doubt by beginning with Jesus’ genealogy. A family tree. What Matthew is trying to say is that none of this is by chance. What Matthew is saying is that “you will not understand what I am about to tell you in the rest of my gospel, unless you read it in the context of the big picture represented by the family tree. . . .”

After listing all the names he summarizes it in verse 17, *So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.*

Three groups of 14, how neat and tidy? But the truth is the list is not as neat and tidy as we might think. Matthew has left out various generations in the storyline. It was never his intention to give us an exhaustive family tree. Instead his big message is “I want you to understand that there is a pattern here, with three very important time periods in human history, leading up to this day, captured in the O.T.”

1. From Abraham to David -

Why Abraham? Well, to understand the New Testament in its whole, and this gospel particularly, we need to go back to the story of Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would bring blessing to all the nations of the world through his family tree: *“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed [Through Abraham all nations will be blessed].”*

Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)

The first section of Matthew’s genealogy ends with David. God promised David that his throne would last forever:

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:16 (ESV)

Matthew says the second important period of O.T. human history is

2. From David to the deportation to Babylon -

The deportation represents the exile when many of God’s people, the Israelites, were forcibly taken from Jerusalem, from the land God had promised them. God promised he would keep them in the land as long as they were obedient and faithful to him, but they were not. They sinned and they rebelled against God. So God did to them exactly what he promised Moses he would do, he sent them into exile (Deut. 28:58-63). But that wasn’t the end of God’s promise.

The people’s rebellion against God’s covenant made with Moses would not destroy his prior covenant he had made with Abraham. Matthew begins his gospel by showing how God was faithful to Abraham. He preserved the royal line, // though it would be greatly reduced in size and in honor. Not all would be brought back in, just the faithful ones.

The third important period of human history, at least O.T. human history, is

3. The deportation to the birth of Christ -

Finally, Matthew traces the royal line to a lowly carpenter and a young woman from Nazareth. Into their lives God entrusts the Christ child, the promised seed of Abraham. The genealogy, while it may be boring and seem insignificant at first glance or first hearing, // is the story of God’s faithfulness to his promise to bless all the nations of the earth.

Matthew is telling us that it all begins with the Child born in the manger, in the little town of Bethlehem, to humble and insignificant parents, that which God set in place even before the creation of humankind. He traces the family tree, through some very famous people, through some very insignificant people, through some very sinful people, and some who were grafted into the family tree from outside the royal line. He even includes a few women, which would have been unthinkable in the day. And then Matthew begins his gospel with perhaps the most insignificant person of all, Joseph.

Joseph is often the forgotten person in the Christmas story. In fact if it wasn't for Matthew and his gospel we would really know nothing about him. We sing that famous Christmas hymn, **“What Child is This?”** The hymn poses the same important question as the theme of our series for this Advent and Christmas season. “What Child is This or What is the True Meaning of Christmas?” The hymn goes through the many different characters of the Christmas story: the Christ child, His mother named Mary, the shepherds, angels, the wise men. There is even two forms of feeding livestock – the ox and the ass. All the characters normally present in a Nativity display are accounted for with the exception of one.

There is no mention of Joseph. There is no mention of the man who would help raise the “Son of Mary.” Everybody else in the Christmas story gets air time or makes a cameo appearance, but the primary man who would love and invest himself in the life of this special child gets none. And the hymn writer of “What Child is This?” is not alone. The writer of Mark's gospel gives Joseph the exact same amount of exposure – zero, zilch, nothing. And while Matthew, Luke and John all mention Joseph by name, none of them record him as having a speaking part.

But Joseph might just have been the person in the first Christmas story who had to give up the most – his reputation as both a man and a good faithful Jew. It says in our passage this morning that Joseph was “a just man” (v.19). The Greek word that is used there to describe Joseph, which we translate in English as “just” has much more meaning and significance than we give that word today. It means being “righteous” – a person who has a faithful covenant relationship with God. A person who because of that faithful covenant relationship certain things were expected of him.

Joseph was “betrothed to Mary,” meaning he was engaged to her. And for a Jewish man that meant a couple of very important things: 1) It was looked upon as already being married (to break it off one had to get a certificate of divorce); and 2) the couple could not sleep together, no sexual relations. //We live in a culture today that has almost no sense of that. Even our Christian culture. Many of us don't even blink an eye today when a couple lives together without being married. We're address lots of other sin, even other sexual sin, but not that one. Our culture even has a phrase for it, “friends with benefits.” Contrast that to Joseph's day and what was expected of a just and righteous man (and by extension a just and righteous woman), the period of betrothal could be called “married without benefits.”

Joseph, as a righteous and just man had not slept with Mary. How could she be pregnant? There is only one explanation. She had to have slept with someone else. As a righteous and faithful Jewish man the right thing to do (that which was expected of him) was to divorce her. Joseph, being even above that, wanted to do it quietly, not to bring shame upon her.

But then, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, “*Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*”²¹ *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*”²² *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*²³ “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel*” (which means, *God with us*).²⁴ *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,*²⁵ *but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

Joseph is not present in the hymn, “What Child is This?” His words are not present in any of the four gospel texts, but Joseph was present at the manger. He was present before the manger and He was present after the manger. He was present at least up until Jesus’ 12th birthday as recorded in Luke, chapter 2. Beyond that, most historians believe Joseph died somewhere between Jesus’ teenage years and the beginning of his public ministry at age 30. And during the early childhood years of Jesus’ life on earth, not only is the Christ child known as the “Son of Mary,” he was also known as the “Son of Joseph.”

What child is this? He is the child who was adopted by a father who loved Him and took him as his son. How do we know Jesus was adopted by Joseph? Well, there are clues in the few places in the Bible that mention him. In our passage this morning it says that not only did Joseph take Mary to be his wife, but that he names the child Jesus.

In the day, the naming of a child was the responsibility of the father. The intention of God was for Joseph to adopt Jesus as his son and to become his earthly father. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem on that first Christmas night, Joseph accepted him as his adopted son and named him Jesus. Most likely he laid the infant boy across his knees, which was a symbolic act for 1st century Jewish men acknowledging the legitimacy of his newborn descendant. Although the Bible does not state explicitly that Joseph did this, it is highly probable that he did, adopting the Son of Mary as his own.

We know Mary viewed her husband Joseph as Jesus’ father because in Luke’s gospel where we have the account of Jesus when he was 12-years-old staying behind at the temple and when his exasperated mother found him she is quoted as saying: “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, **your father** and I have been searching for you in great distress” (Luke 2:48).

Twice in John’s gospel Jesus is referred to by others as “the son of Joseph.” Everybody who knew Jesus recognized him as Joseph’s son. Joseph had adopted Jesus as his son from day one. **What child is this?** One of the characteristics that answers the question is found in reflecting on Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph. **Like his earthly Father, Joseph, Jesus’ heavenly Father, God, is the One who adopts and names us as part of His own family.**

The apostle Paul writes about this characteristic of Jesus who would grow from the baby in the manger to the God who was willing not only to die to redeem all of creation, but also to lay across His knees all people who repent of their sinfulness and put their faith in Him as the only one who can save them, and He calls them His children.

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive **adoption** as sons [and daughters].⁶ And because you are sons [and daughters], God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son [or a daughter], and if a son [or daughter], then an heir through God.* Galatians 4:4-7 (ESV)

What child is this? He is the one who makes adoption into the family of God possible. And adoption leads to our salvation which includes our freedom from sin and from eternal death, to eternal life. That is what Joseph was told to name his adoptive Son when He would be born. *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

The name Jesus means “God saves.” Through the baby born in the manger 2,000 years ago God provides the opportunity for all people to be saved, to be adopted into His family. Repentance and faith in Jesus is the only way we are adopted in.

- Forget the presents
- Turn out the lights
- Santa Claus, Adotherwise known as Saint Nicholas was a human at best
- Stop all the running around
- And focus on the Christ child this Advent and Christmas season
- Focus on the one who brings light into our darkness
- Raises the dead to life
- And provides the opportunity for all to be adopted into God’s family – the only way to eternal life
- Focus on the Christ child!