Christmas in Matthew (Part 1) Dec. 7, 2025
1 of 5 in *Christmas in the Gospels* Matthew 1:1-25

Today, we begin a new series called *Christmas in the Gospels*.

In the Bible, the word *gospel* simply means *good news*. And the biblical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John— are divinely inspired accounts of the good news of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. They provide four portraits of the same Messiah, from different angles, so we can see him all the more clearly.

Mark makes no reference to Jesus' birth in his Gospel. But taken together, Matthew, Luke and John give us a rich, multifaceted picture of the wonder of the incarnation— of the God who was born into this world as a flesh-and-blood human being, to save us from our sins, and to be with us.

Our prayer is that throughout December, as we hear the accounts of Jesus' birth from each of these Gospel voices, we'll encounter Jesus anew.

Today, we'll explore Matthew's account of the Christmas story in chapter 1 of his Gospel. Next Sunday, Pastor Jeremy will continue the story with Matthew chapter 2.

Let's start with the reading of scripture. I'll be reading excerpts from Jesus' genealogy in Matthew chapter 1, followed the full text of verses 18-25.

> **1** This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:
>
> **2** Abraham was the father of Isaac,
> Isaac the father of Jacob,
> Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
> **3** Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar…
>
> **5** Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
> Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
> Obed the father of Jesse,
> **6** and Jesse the father of King David.
> David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife…
>
> **11** and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.
>
> **16** … Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.
>
> **17** Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.
>
> **18** This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. **19** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

> **20** But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."
>
> **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").
>
> **24** When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. [1]

In this passage, Matthew highlights **three themes at the heart of Jesus' arrival**, each with significant implications for our lives. The first of these themes is that:

1. God keeps His promises.

Matthew opens his Gospel with a genealogy—a list of names that, at first glance, might seem dry and boring. And yet it's *anything but* when you understand how he's put that list together. The very framework of this family tree declares that God keeps his promises. In verse 17 we read that:

> Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. [2]

Matthew arranges the genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations, or six sevens, with Jesus being the *seventh seven*.

The number seven carries symbolic weight throughout Scripture. It represents completion or perfection. By positioning Jesus as the *seventh seven*, Matthew signals that history has reached its divinely appointed fulfillment. Everything God has promised now converges in the coming of Jesus.

Indeed, later in chapter 1, what does the Lord say to Joseph in a dream?

> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet… [3]

The promises to Abraham that his descendants would bless all nations, the promises to David that his line would produce a king who rules forever—these spanned centuries, yet God fulfills them precisely on his timetable. [4]

You see, what may feel like delay to us is just the right timing to God. Listen to what Tim Keller says about this:

---

[1] Matthew 1:1-3a, 5-6, 11, 16-17, 18-25 (NIV)
[2] Matthew 1:17 (NIV)
[3] Matthew 1:22 (NIV)
[4] Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:8-16

> You cannot judge God by your calendar. God may appear to be slow, but he never forgets his promises… God's grace virtually never operates on our time frame, on a schedule we consider reasonable… but he comes through in ways we can't imagine... [5]

Not only does God's timing rarely match ours—*he also fulfills his promises and answers our prayers in ways that surprise us*.

Consider Mary—a young woman, pledged to be married to Joseph, suddenly pregnant by the Holy Spirit. This confounded every human expectation. Yet this surprising, almost scandalous beginning was precisely how God chose to bring salvation into the world.

Along the very same lines, it was only by coming in weakness, and ultimately dying on the cross, that Jesus could accomplish our salvation. This blew up everyone's preconceptions of what Messiah should be, but regardless:

> *God. Keeps. His. Promises.*

Perhaps you find yourself saying, "Well, I have no trouble believing that God keeps his promises to me. But I've done a lousy job keeping my promises to God. I've messed up my life so much that it can't be put right again." Take heart, friend. Just have a look at Matthew's genealogy, and see how:

2. God grace flows through a messy family tree.

A popular Christmas gift in recent years has been those genetic mail-in kits. You know, the ones where you send in a vial of your spit and get a full breakdown of your heritage. Has anyone ever given or received one of those?

Often people are *surprised* by their results. You think you know your background, and then the test reveals family tree branches you never expected. Matthew does something similar: he points out parts of Jesus' family line that no one would have highlighted—the surprising branches, the complicated stories. And he shows us that God is not embarrassed by any of it. In fact, God works in it, through it, and in spite of it all.

For starters, Matthew names five women in Jesus' genealogy—*Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba,* and *Mary*.

> **3** Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was **Tamar**…
> **5** Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was **Rahab**,
> Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was **Ruth**,
> Obed the father of Jesse,
> **6** and Jesse the father of King David.
> David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been **Uriah's wife**…
> **11** and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

[5] Tim Keller, *Hidden Christmas*, p. 34-35.

16 and… Joseph, the husband of Mary, and **Mary** was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. [6]

The mention of women in a family tree may seem like no big deal to us, but in the patriarchal culture of Matthew's day, women had no legal rights, and were rarely acknowledged in genealogies. They were considered *gender outsiders.*

And except for Mary, all of the women Matthew names are Gentiles, or non-Jews. So, they are *ethnic outsiders* as well. This makes the story of the Messiah's pedigree even more intriguing, pointing to the fact that Jesus was born not only to be *Israel's* Messiah, but to be the Saviour of *all peoples*.

But there's more. For readers who know about the stories of some of these women, and (it's crucially important to add) the men they were involved with, Matthew is bringing to mind some of the Bible's more sordid and immoral incidents.

For example, he makes a point of mentioning Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar.

Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was **Tamar**… [7]

Judah had been unjust to Tamar, leaving her in an extremely vulnerable position. So, she posed as a prostitute and tricked him into sleeping with her so she wouldn't be left childless. [8]

Through this messy and complicated situation, Tamar bore twins, and one of them—Perez—became an ancestor of Jesus, as you can see in Matthew's genealogy.

Matthew then mentions Rahab, who was not only an ethnic outsider, but also a prostitute whose courageous, faith-filled actions helped save God's people from their enemies. [9]

But here's the real kicker. In verse 6 we read:

6 and Jesse the father of **King David**.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been **Uriah's wife**… [10]

My mother once told me that on her side of the family, Abraham Lincoln is a distant relative. (So, if you ever wondered why I have a certain *presidential* air about me, now you know.) The thing is, I'm far more likely to mention that Lincoln might be in my family tree than I am to talk about my socially maladjusted great-uncle who lived as a recluse.

In the same way, when Matthew lists King David, we might be tempted to say, "Now we're talking—*royalty*— someone you can brag about having in your family tree!" But in an understated way, Matthew adds that David was the father of Solomon *whose mother had been Uriah's wife*. Who remembers the name of Uriah's wife? It was Bathsheba. Why doesn't Matthew say her name? It's not meant to be a

[6] Matthew 1:3a, 5-6, 11, 16 (NIV)
[7] Matthew 1:3a (NIV)
[8] Genesis 38
[9] Joshua 2, 6:25
[10] Matthew 1:6 (NIV)

slight of Bathsheba. Instead, it's a slam of David, who abused his authority as king, got her pregnant, and then had her husband Uriah—one of his most loyal captains—killed in an effort to cover up his sin.

Even though David is the most prominent person in the whole genealogy other than Jesus himself, Matthew intentionally calls attention to David's biggest *moral failure*.

What does all this tell us? Well, for starters, to quote Tim Keller once again, it tells us that Jesus comes for *all people*:

> In Jesus Christ, prostitute and king, male and female, Jew and Gentile, one race and another race, moral and immoral – all sit down as equals. Equally sinful and lost, equally accepted and loved. [Is this biblical genealogy] Boring? No. The grace of God is so pervasive that [it is] dripping with God's mercy. [11]

In other words, no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. Your failures, scars, and vulnerabilities can become part of God's greater story.

If you look at the back of a tapestry, it looks messy, tangled, ugly. But when you view it from the front, the design is beautiful and purposeful. God sees both sides of us, and by his grace weaves our messy lives into the beautiful tapestry of his divine plan.

That brings us to the third theme at the heart of Jesus' arrival:

3. The God who saves and stays.

Matthew's Christmas account moves from the genealogy to the miraculous conception of Jesus.

Joseph and Mary were betrothed, which is like engagement, but legally binding. Should either party decide not to go ahead with marriage, a legal divorce was required to end the betrothal.

In our text, Joseph discovers Mary's pregnancy and, according to Jewish law, this could have led to her being stoned to death. But Joseph plans to act compassionately, intending to divorce her discretely.

> **20** But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."
>
> **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). [12]

The angel wants Jospeh to know exactly who Jesus was and is, and so in the traditional Jewish custom reveals his names. Those names show that he is the ultimate revelation of the God who saves and stays.

- **Jesus (*Yeshua*): "The Lord saves"**

[11] Keller, *Hidden Christmas*, 32-33.
[12] Matthew 1:20-23 (NIV)

- **Immanuel: "God with us"**

Jesus, or *Yeshua*, was a popular boys name at the time, being in Hebrew the same as *Joshua*—the one who led the Israelites into the Promised Land after the death of Moses. Matthew sees Jesus as the one who will now complete what the law of Moses pointed to, but could not itself produce. Jesus will rescue his people not from slavery in Egypt, but from the slavery of sin.

And that matters profoundly when you remember the people named in his own family tree—men and women whose stories—like yours and mine— include deception, failure, scandal, betrayal, and deep brokenness.

By contrast, the name *Immanuel*, drawn from Isaiah's prophecy, wasn't common at all. That's probably because of how presumptuous it would have been for anyone to call their child "God with us". [13]

But in Jesus, God enters our world, and draws near. His heart ever beats to be close to us— "God with us", fully present in the midst of our daily lives with their highs and lows, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears.

Did you know that Matthew's whole gospel is framed by this very theme? In its closing words, Jesus promises to *be with* his followers *always*, to the very end of the age. [14]

Jesus reveals the God who saves and stays. Together, the names *Yeshua* and *Immanuel* express why he was born into this world. When we acknowledge our sins, and accept the forgiveness that he bled and died to make available to us, he opens the way for us to experience the intimate relationship with God that we've been created to enjoy.

Communion

As we prepare our hearts for communion now, I invite you to bow your head, close your eyes, and open your hands in a receptive posture. In God's presence, would you now reflect with me on the following?

Christmas means that Jesus literally moved heaven and earth to get near us—to get near you. And so, this Christmas season, it's good to ask yourself, "How is God inviting *me* to truly be with *him*?"

> Is it to grow in your prayer life—to communicate more often with God?
>
> Is it to deepen your commitment to seeking God in his written Word, the Bible—to read it, study it, meditate on it?
>
> Is it to participate more fully in the life of the church—in the worship, fellowship and mission of God's people?
>
> Is it to have the courage to follow Jesus when obedience costs you something—your comfort, your reputation, or even your safety— just as Joseph bore misunderstanding and suspicion from those who doubted the reason for Mary's pregnancy?

[13] Isaiah 7:14, 8:8
[14] Matthew 28:20

Is it to surrender the right to "name" yourself—to stop living your life on the terms you decide—just as Joseph had to relinquish his fatherly right to name the child and submit to God's naming?

Is it to admit, with humility and courage, that you are a sinner in need of the Saviour—just as Joseph had to accept that he, too, needed the salvation this child would bring?

However God may be speaking to you, Jesus invites you to respond by coming to his Table.

We come remembering Matthew 1: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

In this child, God came near—*Immanuel, God with us*. Born into a line of flawed people, he enters our story, our world, our humanity, taking on flesh and blood which would be broken and shed to save us from our sins.

By his Holy Spirit, he is present with us today, offering forgiveness, hope and life.

And we eagerly await his return—his second Advent— when he will come again in glory, making all things new, to be with us, his people, forever.

Now, we pray come Holy Spirit, bless this bread and cup. Through them, make Christ present to us, fill us with his life, strengthen our hearts, and draw us closer to Jesus, the child born to be God with us—the same Jesus who says:

This is my body, broken for you.
Take and eat, in remembrance of me.

And this is my blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins.
Take and drink, trusting that I am with you now, and forever.