

ADVENT 2021

Christmas Is More Than a Story

Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew 1:1-17 ¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

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

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

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

¹⁷So 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.

One look at the news on any given day tells us that something is horribly broken at the core of the human race. Even people who don't believe in God or the Bible **agree** that something is wrong — that the world is not

what it OUGHT TO be. What they **disagree** on is ¹. What has caused this brokenness? — and ². What's the cure? The Bible says that sin is the reason why everything is broken. And by the way EVERYTHING is broken. There isn't an individual or a group of individuals or any structure or system in society that isn't broken.

Revelation 21:5 (CSB) ⁵Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new." He also said, "Write, because these words are faithful and true."

The cause is sin! Sin is, at its core, man putting himself in the place of His creator. There is no social, political, educational or behavioral reform that can remedy the disaster of sin! The Bible tells us that the remedy is found in the child who's birth we celebrate on December 25th.

In about six weeks we're going to celebrate the birth of that Child. But here's the deal No matter where you look in culture over the next six weeks it will be virtually impossible to find even a hint that Christmas is the celebration of God coming in human flesh to redeem and rescue sinners and ultimately make all things new!

Somewhere around 450AD Christians began to set apart four weeks to prepare their hearts to celebrate His birth. Those four weeks became a fixed part of the calendar year for the church. Those weeks were given the title ADVENT — from the latin word "adventus" which means "arrival."

We're going to spend the next five Sundays leading up to Christmas Eve walking around in the story of this child. Our starting point is going to be the first chapter in the Gospel according to Matthew.

The Gospel according to Matthew doesn't have a Star Wars beginning — "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...". Matthew doesn't start with "Once upon a time....". Matthew begins with this:

Matthew 1:1 NLT This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah

Matthew 1:1 HCSB The historical record of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

So here we go!

Some of you are too young to relate to this analogy, but here goes. Sometimes reading the genealogies in the Old Testament feels a lot like reading the Phone Book. The “Phone Book” was about ten pounds of paper with thousands of names printed on dull white paper in alphabetical order with their phone number (hence the very clever branding — “Phone Book”). The phone company would leave it on your driveway or porch. You had to put on one of those back braces and remind yourself to lift with your legs — and then find a really big space in your house to store it.

Matthew’s genealogy is WAY more than a data base — way more than a long list of names!

If you have been here at Metro for a while you have heard me say more than once that the Gospel is not “good advice” — it’s “Good News”.

Matthew begins everything that he is about to say about Jesus with a historical record of historical people — grounding everything that he is going to say about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus in real history. The Christmas Story is not some story — it is History.

We can **never** understate the nature of the Gospel. It is not spiritual and moral advice. It’s a report; a record of something that has been done. Advice tells you what **you** must **do**. News is a report about what’s already **been done**. Advice says, “It’s all up to you.” News says that something has already been accomplished that changes everything! The only thing you can do is respond to that news.

Matthew launches into his account of the birth of Jesus with the record of the ancestors of Jesus, so we will know that the Christmas Story is not advice about how we can live a better life. Matthew didn’t give us **a genealogical record** dating back about 2,000 years as the prelude to a heart-warming fiction that is filled with life lessons. What in the world

would such a Christmas story advise us to do? Be shepherds? Give birth in dark back alleys? The best first crib for a baby is a stone feeding trough?

The birth of Jesus is NOT that at all. Matthew wants us to know that the birth of a baby boy in a dark alley of 1st century Bethlehem is **THE point** of **Old Testament**. We really can't understand the Christmas story unless we see it in the light of a much longer story that goes back over 2,000 years.

Christopher Wright — *“The Old Testament tells the story that Jesus completes.”*¹

THIS IS HUGE — This list of names is nothing less than the history of God's unending love towards us that moved progressively through human history to rescue the very world that has been relentless in its rebellion against Him!

QUOTE: Timothy Keller — *We have put ourselves in the place of God, that is, in charge of our lives. So God has put himself in our place where we deserve to be. Where is that? Out in the cold. Out in the stable. No room. Jesus Christ was thrown out in the cold where we deserve to be (spiritually speaking) so we could be brought in.*

Mike Neglia — who pastors in Ireland — said this about the birth of Jesus —

QUOTE: Mike Neglia — *The incarnation is **THE** universe-sundering, history-altering, life-transforming, paradigm-shattering event of history.*

Most of the world is really okay with the Gospel if it's merely advice that you can take or leave — follow or not — or if it's a story about a guy you can take or leave. But a Gospel that's the announcement of something that actually happened in history; the announcement that God came into this world in 1st century Bethlehem — that He really did live and suffer and die for the very world that rebelled against Him (that includes you and me) — that He really did rise, triumphant over the grave — nnnnot so much! Here's why: You just can't do nothing about that Jesus! When people

¹ Excerpt From: Christopher J. H. Wright. “Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament.”

relegate the birth of Jesus to just another “Hallmark” made for TV Christmas Story they can keep Christmas to shopping and gift-giving and great food with friends and family. That kind of Christmas has no bearing on their moral choices or on the way they choose to live. But if the birth of Jesus is the historic fulfillment of the promises of God over the course of 2,000+ years — then everything Jesus says is “right,” **is** right — and everything Jesus says is “wrong,” **is** wrong!

THIS IS HUGE — The story of the birth of Jesus has life-transforming, eternity shaping implications **because** it is not just another story. I came across some things that C.S. Lewis said about the true story of Christmas — the true story of the Gospel. Lewis essentially said that the true story about Jesus tells us something about all the stories we love. These stories that are not real come from hearts that long for the real story! Have you ever wondered where stories like *Beauty and the Beast*, or *Peter Pan*, or *Sleeping Beauty* came from? *Beauty and the Beast*: The story of a love that can overcome that which is so unlovable and so ugly about us; rescue us from our aloneness. The movie *Finding Neverland*, or the book *Peter Pan: We were made to fly and never grow old*. Or *Sleeping Beauty*: A young woman in a living death and a handsome prince who can awaken her and take her away. Where do those stories come from? Those things never really happened — but they are so powerful! Men and women are moved by them, because consciously, or unconsciously, we have a feeling that we were made for a world and a life in which there is love that is greater than the ugliest thing about us — a love that is so great that it never quits, never walks away from us — a love that transforms us. Consciously, or unconsciously, we have a feeling that that we really are under the grip of some malevolent force; a feeling that we really weren’t meant to die.

Matthew introduces the story of Jesus as a matter of history so that we will understand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just one more story. He wants us to know that **Jesus Christ** is the underlying reality to which all the stories point. Jesus is real. Jesus really happened. Jesus Christ has come from the world we long to belong to! The history of His relentless love brought us to the thing we call Christmas. Jesus is God who has broken into our world!

Jesus Christ **IS** the prince who rescues us from the malevolent powers of sin and spiritual wickedness! There really is a love that will never give up on us — that love has name — JESUS! Jesus **IS** life — and the One who **IS** life defeated death. The Bible tells us that because of Jesus there is coming a day when the trees are going to clap their hands.

Here's another reason why this genealogy is so important to understanding the story of Christmas. This record of the ancestors of Jesus is essentially a résumé. In the day of Jesus, a person's genealogy was the way in which the person recommended himself or herself to the world.

In our culture we tend to leave the bad bits out of our résumé. We leave out the parts of our educational or professional life that would put us in less than favorable light. The genealogy of Jesus tells us so much about the heart and the ways of God. Follow me here!

FIRST — There are five women in the genealogy of Jesus. That's remarkable because in that time and culture women weren't important. Jews *never* included women in their genealogies. Every Pharisee would pray every morning, *"Thank God that I'm not a gentile, a dog, or a woman."* In anyone else's genealogy they would have been excluded — left out — because of *gender*. Yet God includes them.

The genealogy of Jesus tells us **valued those the world didn't**. The genealogy of Jesus proves exactly what God said to Moses — ***He is the LORD — FULL of compassion!***

SECOND — Three of the five women in His genealogy were Gentiles. Tamar, and Rahab were Canaanites; Ruth was Moabite. Gentiles were considered unclean and were never allowed into the holy place within the Tabernacle and later the temple. In anyone else's genealogy they would have been excluded — left out — not only because of gender but because of *race*. Yet God included them.

The genealogy of Jesus tells us that **God received those the religious world rejected. Grace!**

THIRD — The résumé of Jesus included some incredibly immoral people — men and women who committed adultery and incest.

verse 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar

Tamar tricked her father-in-law, Judah, into sleeping with her — an act of incest forbidden in the law of Moses.

Verse 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab

Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute living in Jericho.

The list gets really interesting in **verse 6**

Verse 6 and Jesse the father of David the king.

A king! Now there's somebody you want on your résumé. And this wasn't just any king — this was the greatest king in the history of Israel — King David. Then it says

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,

Why doesn't Matthew just put the name of Solomon's mom there? Because Uriah was one of David's best friends. Uriah was a man who had risked his life for David. One day, when kings were supposed to be at war, David stayed back home. He got up from a nap and walked out onto his rooftop and saw Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, bathing. David wanted her — sent for her — and had her. Bathsheba got pregnant, so David arranged to have Uriah killed to cover his sin of adultery and take the wife of his friend! In time David and Bathsheba had a boy named Solomon. Matthew left the name of Bathsheba off the genealogy of Jesus, not to slam Bathsheba — but to slam David.

This record of the ancestors of Jesus is literally **The History of Grace**. People who in any other genealogy of the day would have been excluded because of gender, race, and moral failure are included in the genealogy of Jesus. An illegitimate child, a prostitute, Canaanites, an adulterer, a murderer

— according to the Law of Moses such people were excluded from the presence of God — yet they're in the genealogy of Jesus.

This list of historical ancestors is LITERALLY a **History of Grace** because men and women who were excluded by culture, and even excluded by the law of God, Jesus Christ owns as His. This genealogy tells us that it doesn't matter how low you are in the eyes of culture — it doesn't matter **what** you've done — the grace of Jesus Christ can cover you.

This résumé reminds us that the Gospel is good news. It's not advice — it's the real story — it's the record of what God has done to save you in the sending of His Son Jesus. It is what **God has done** that gives you right standing with God.

This genealogy tells us that there is no one so great that they don't need the grace of Jesus. This genealogy tells us that there is no one so bad that they can't receive the grace of Jesus. The men and women in this genealogy tell us that **because of Jesus** there's a way for prostitute and king, male and female, Jew and Gentile, moral and immoral to sit down as equals in the Kingdom of God. Amazing!

Because He has done for you what you didn't deserve and could never earn (grace) — we're all in his genealogy.

***Hebrews 2:11 NLT** So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.*

This genealogy shatters the value systems of fallen culture! The world values pedigree. The world values money. The world values race. The world values class. Jesus turns all that upside down. This genealogy tells us — tells the church — that things that are so important out *there* should not be so important in *here*." Grace is the only thing that gives value and meaning!

And because this genealogy shatters the value system of fallen culture we can finally have rest. It is so exhausting trying to constantly prove yourself — prove you're worthy to be included — prove you're worthy to be valued

and accepted by the value system of fallen culture. This record of the ancestors reminds us WHY the Christmas is worthy of our attention and that we are really celebrating Jesus Christ tells you and me that it doesn't really matter *who* you are or *what* you are in this world. It tells you and me that we *need* God's grace — and it tells you we can *have* God's grace. Because God has done everything to save us it doesn't matter if you're a prostitute or a king, moralist or murder.

QUOTE: Keller — *“I want to do better in my life to please him, but I don't have to do better in order to know him.”*

THAT is real rest! Real rest that is the result of a real event.

This list of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah tell us that Jesus came to be with the likes of us and associate with the likes of us and then ultimately carry our burden of sin on the cross. It was in his heart from eternity to be “God with us” — “friend of sinners.” **Jesus came in such a way that** no sinner would feel embarrassed or uncomfortable to come into His presence; listen to His words; receive His good news.