

Readings and Devotions
for
Advent,
the Twelve Days of Christmas,
and Epiphany

DECEMBER 6—Eighth Day of Advent

MATTHEW 1:1-17

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: ² Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. ⁴ Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. ⁵ Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. ⁷ Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. ⁸ Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. ⁹ Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. ¹⁰ Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. ¹¹ Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. ¹² And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. ¹³ Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. ¹⁴ Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. ¹⁵ Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. ¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. ¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

The Bible contains many genealogies, but only two “book[s] of genealogy” – Adam’s and Christ’s (Gn 5.1; Mt 1.1). Matthew’s opening line is an exact quote from Genesis 5.1 in the Septuagint. Thus what seems to moderns as a rather boring way to open the New Testament was actually a bombshell to first century Jews. Matthew signals right off the bat that Jesus is a new Adam, the primogenitor of a new human race, the inaugurator of a new creation! But how has Jesus accomplished what neither Abraham nor David nor any of David’s royal sons have been able to accomplish? That is what the New Testament was written to answer.

Matthew begins the answer in fine Hebrew fashion – with a riddle wrapped inside an enigma. The enigma is Israel, who was always at war with herself, her calling, and her destiny, who was always self-destructing and missing out on her inheritance. Israel was still in captivity – that’s what many Jews believed – and she needed a new exodus. This is precisely the point Matthew makes (very cleverly) by repeatedly mentioning the Babylonian captivity, but never any return (1.11, 12, 17). But here’s the real problem – it was Israel’s own treachery that had landed her in exile,

and like the leopard that couldn’t change its spots, Israel couldn’t change her heart. Matthew drives this home by doing something very rare for ancient genealogies – he includes four women.

First there is Tamar (Mt 1.3), the Gentile ex-wife of Judah’s son, Er, whom the Lord killed for his wickedness (Gn 38.6-7). Tamar was more righteous than Judah (as Judah himself confessed), for she had to disguise herself as a harlot and trick Judah into fulfilling his God-given duty to his deceased son, and then Tamar had to expose Judah to keep him from burning her as a harlot! (Gn 38.11-26.) So, the scepter shall not depart from *Judah*? Matthew’s point precisely.

Then there are Rahab the Harlot and Ruth the Moabitess (1.5), two Gentile women who exemplified faith, devotion, and constancy like Israel should have but never did (Ruth 1.16-17; Hb 11.31; Hos 6.4-7).

Finally there is Bathsheba, whom Matthew delicately refers to as “she who had been the wife of Uriah (1.6).” Murder, adultery, cover-up, these were the actions of King David. If David was the man after God’s own heart, where does that leave Israel (and the rest of us)? Fourteen generations of Davidic kings had landed Israel in captivity, and fourteen generations later, the House of David is still under the curse of the covenant (1.17). Israel needs a new kind of Son of David.

Into this old enigma which was Israel, Matthew posits a new riddle . . . which is Jesus. Jesus, the son of David, the Son of Abraham (1.1) . . . but how is he their *father*? You see, a “book of genealogy” is only for primogenitors (like Adam), and it lists their *descendants* (Gn 5). Jesus is somehow the Root *and* Branch of David (Rv 22.16), David’s son *and* David’s lord (Mt 22.45). But how? Answer the riddle of Jesus and you will learn how Jesus is a new Adam, how he has begun a new human race, and how he is making all things new.

Now then, you are ready to hear the story of the birth of Jesus. Enjoy!

—Pastor Alan Burrow, *The King’s Congregation, Meridian, Idaho*

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you that we do not live in the same world into which Jesus came, for He has overcome and has begun the regeneration of all things. Thank you that by Your Spirit we do not live in the Book of the Genealogy of Adam, but the Book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ. Help us to live up to our lineage! AMEN.

ADVENT APPLICATION

Discuss with your family how God has used your family tree (the good and the bad) to providentially bring the gospel to your household. Discuss how you, too, are part of the “book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,” what that means, and how you should live.

DECEMBER 7—Ninth Day of Advent

MATTHEW 1:18-21

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

In this story about the birth of the Messiah, we see Joseph’s godliness under difficult circumstances, his inability to perceive good, and God’s mysterious use of “unlikely” things. Joseph made a worthy attempt to start a family by finding an exemplary young woman, Mary, and becoming engaged to her. Although he behaved honorably, she was suddenly found to be pregnant! How could Mary have “done” this to him? Imagine Joseph’s disappointment and humiliation! How could he marry this woman and bring the apparent shame of infidelity to himself and to his family? Most people in Joseph’s situation would feel a need to get even and to assert his own innocence by punishing Mary. But we see that the heavenly Father, in His wisdom selected a godly man to act as an earthly father for the Son. Even under the duress of a broken engagement and a sullied reputation, we see Joseph exercising self-control and concern for Mary. But even with his good disposition, Joseph could not see what was happening or how he should respond. It was only by God’s grace in sending an angel that Joseph could begin to understand that the very one who he thought was unclean and dishonorable was actually the incarnation of righteousness and honor. The one, who appeared to be illegitimate, was the only true Son. The one, who looked like Joseph’s potential ruin, would become not only his Savior, but the world’s Savior.

—Pastor David Givler, *Christ Covenant Church, San Antonio, Texas*

PRAYER

Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You that Your good will toward Your children is so pervasive that even bad things turn out to be for our blessing. Send the Holy Spirit to us as you sent the angel to Joseph so that, like him, we can

comprehend Your goodness. Help us to have faith like his so that we would be stable and selfless under trying circumstances. And though we are small, weak, and sinful; we pray that You would be pleased to use us as unlikely vessels to glorify yourself. In Jesus’ name we pray, AMEN.

ADVENT APPLICATION

Discuss with your family how God likes to accomplish His will through weak and despised things like a stuttering Moses who would lead Israel out of slavery, a blind man who would be healed, and a little child of inexplicable origin who would save mankind from its sin. If God works through these types of things, should we expect Him to work through our weaknesses? If He does work through our weaknesses, then how should we behave when confronted with difficulties and suffering? What do we need to help us to see God’s goodness and to behave properly at difficult times?

DECEMBER 8—Tenth Day of Advent

MATTHEW 1:22-25

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” 24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

The prophet Isaiah said that Jesus would be called Immanuel, which means literally God with us! (Isaiah 7:14). The prophet goes on in the next chapter to explain how the people of Israel were not to fear their earthly enemies. Rather he tells them, “Jehovah of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isaiah 8:13-14). We see that the God, who is now with us, is to be our dread and our sanctuary. This baby would not grow up to be the wimpy Jesus that is often pictured. Rather He would grow in stature with God and men to become the Savior of the world who we are to properly fear and dread. The one to whom we must flee for sanctuary from the wrath of God (a wrath that is due to us because of our sins), calling only on the name of Jesus to be saved. The prophet also warns us that we must not allow Jesus to be a stumbling block through unbelief. We must come to Him believing that He is Immanuel, God with us, or else we too will fall and stumble as did many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in that day. We see this proper fear and obedience in Joseph who when he awoke “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.” No doubting or demanding, just simple obedience! Doing what would ruin his “reputation” and be hard to explain to all of his friends, but doing what needed to be done so God’s great plan of salvation would move forward. This Advent season may we truly see Jesus as Immanuel who has come to save His people from their sins, and may we respond with the faithful and simple obedience of that simple carpenter Joseph. We must remember the promise of Romans 10:13: “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

—Pastor John Stoos, Church of the King,
Sacramento, California

PRAYER

Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus! We thank You that when the time had come you brought Him forth from a virgin to be the Savior of the world. We thank You for His great name Immanuel, reminding us that God has truly visited His people. By your grace, may we live our lives in such a way that we show forth His love to a needy world. AMEN.

ADVENT APPLICATION

Discuss with your family the significance of names. Discuss some of your family names and perhaps share the stories of how some of these names were chosen. You could even look up the meaning of your names. But, most importantly, discuss how we get a new name when we are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The world now calls us Christians. We are saved because we have called upon the name of Jesus! What does this mean for how we should live our lives?

DECEMBER 9—Eleventh Day of Advent

LUKE 1:26-31

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Do you like surprises? God sure does. He likes ad libs and pretzelly plot lines. Take this passage for instance. How many surprises can you count? Well, maybe you found more than I, but here goes. First, imagine an angel appearing to you. Angels are scary people. That certainly must have made Mary drop something valuable. Gabriel gave no advanced warning. He didn't make an appointment. One minute, Mary is day dreaming about her wedding to Joseph, and then—pop!—Gabriel is there in the living room, "Rejoice highly favored one!" Another surprise is where this girl lived. She lived in Galilee of the Gentiles. The Jews from Judah had a habit of harrumphing around Galilean Jews. But this is a surprise within a surprise, because God chose not just a distasteful region, but perhaps the worst town He could find within it. Nazareth. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Why, actually. . . yes. Jesus did. Is anything better? Surprise! And then, Gabriel came to see a surprising person. Mary was a poor girl, living in a gross city. You never would have thought to look at her, but within this humble girl ran the blood of Ancient Kings. And Mary was surprised not only by the sudden arrival of the angel, but by what he said. He called her, highly favored one. Certainly she did not think of herself this way. Had Gabriel got the wrong house? The next big surprise came when she learned she was to have the baby, Jesus. How could she be pregnant when she was not married? And God wasn't even through with the surprises, though I am through with my verses, and my allotted space. Why does God give so many surprises? Why does he do things so differently than we would? Well first, just because He likes to. But also, He chooses foolish things to shame the wise, and weak things he chooses to shame the mighty. A baby and a pregnant virgin and a backward town of second-rate Jews—these are

weak things. And through them, God upended the world.

—*Pastor Joost Nixon, Christ Church, Spokane, Washington*

PRAYER

Almighty Father, you show your power in hidden ways. You use weak things to overcome the mighty, and foolish things to overcome the wise. We praise you for sending Jesus in the way you did, and for hiding things from the proud, and revealing them to babes. Grant us the humility, Father, to see the wisdom of your foolishness, and the power of your impotency. AMEN.

ADVENT APPLICATION

God saved us from His wrath through unexpected ways. And He grants smaller salvations, daily, after the same style. Give an example of how God has surprised you with one of His deliverances.

DECEMBER 10—Twelfth Day of Advent

LUKE 1:32-33

³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

In these verses the angel Gabriel has already told Mary that she would have a son and that His name would be Jesus. He has told her not to be afraid and one of the reasons she should not be afraid is that her new son would be great. Her baby was no ordinary human who would be born and then grow up and eventually die. He would be great. Of course, we know how great He would be because we can look back at what He did and who He is. But Mary couldn't do that. She could only listen to Gabriel and accept what He said. And He said the most amazing things! Jesus would be called the Son of the Highest. There is only one way to understand those words: Mary's little baby boy would be called the Son of God. Can you imagine how she felt looking down into the manger nine months later and thinking that this little child was the very Son of God? But Gabriel had more amazing things to say about the baby that was growing inside Mary. He would be given the throne of David and therefore rule over the people of God forever. God promised that David would never be without a descendant on His throne and now Mary's little baby was going to sit on that throne forever, ruling God's people in love and justice.

—Pastor Gene Franklin, Jr., *St. David's Church, Hockley, Texas*

PRAYER

O Lord, you have been so gracious to keep your promises to your people. Long ago you promised that David would always have a descendant on the throne of Israel, then you sent your Son to make sure that will always be true. Please give us that same spirit of faithfulness. In Jesus' name we ask it, AMEN.

ADVENT APPLICATION

Talk with your family about the importance of keeping your promises and show them that God was always faithful to keep His.

DECEMBER 11—Thirteenth Day of Advent

LUKE 1:34-35

³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

In response to the angel’s statement that Mary will conceive in her womb and bring forth a son, Mary asks, “How can this be? How can this be, since I do not know a man?” Upon a cursory reading of the text, we might assume that Mary’s response is one of faithless disbelief. Yet this seems unlikely.... How could it be that the one chosen to bear the only-begotten Son of God be lacking in faith? How could it be that Zechariah who had not believed was condemned to silence, but Mary, if she had not believed, would be exalted by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit? No... Mary’s “How can this be?” was same “How can this be” that a child utters the first time he peer through a microscope and sees a world that he never knew existed in a tiny drop of water. It is the “How can this be” of wonder and awe. It is a “How can this be” that bows down, submitting to a divine mystery that not even she will ever fully comprehend. It is a question that springs from the heart of one who ends the thought with “Yet... not my will, but Your will be done.” It is then that the Holy Spirit comes down and works things which are beyond description and understanding in the life of the believer. Ah, the mystery of the incarnation.

—*Pastor Gene Liechty, Christ Church, Cary, North Carolina*

PRAYER

Creator God, We praise You for all the mysteries which You have placed round about us. They are too wonderful for us and we ask with the writer in Proverbs 30: “Who can understand the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, or the way of a man with a virgin?” Yet, Father, when we come to the incarnation, we arrive at Your greatest work of all... a virgin conceives, eternity takes on flesh, and the world is forever changed. We praise you for this mystery and we thank You for giving us the faith to believe the unimaginable. In Jesus name we pray, AMEN.

ADVENT APPLICATION

Talk with your family about some of the outlandish promises that God makes in regard to you and your children and your future. Discuss the origin and importance of faith in our lives as we walk this God.

DECEMBER 12—Fourteenth Day of Advent

LUKE 1:39-42

³⁹ Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

In this section of his gospel, Luke is interweaving two birth narratives. In the midst of recounting the story of the birth of Jesus Christ, Luke also tells the birth story of Jesus’ cousin and forerunner, John the Baptist. What happened when Mary, with the Son of God in her belly, visited Elizabeth, who was also great with child? The babe in Elizabeth’s womb leapt with joy as the promised Savior drew near! This boggles our minds: How could baby John have known that baby Jesus was near? How did baby John know to leap for joy even enclosed in his mother’s womb? This is a great mystery. And yet again and again, we find that God loves the children of his people, even in their infancy, and that even babies can have a relationship with Jesus. David, the great Israelite king and psalmist, wrote, “From my mother’s womb, You have been my God” (Ps. 22:10). When godly parents brought their infants to Jesus, he did not turn them away, but blessed them and declared, “Of such is the kingdom of God!” (Lk. 18:17). We may not be able to explain how babies belonging to Christian families can be believers, and yet it seems to be the consistent teaching of Scripture. Our children belong to Jesus and to his church from their earliest days. All throughout the Bible, God’s promises are to us and to our children (Gen. 17:7). Christian fathers and mothers are blessed, as is the fruit of a Christian womb. This is the Lord’s covenant with us! God draws people into his kingdom in all kinds of ways, at all ages and stages of life. But for children born into Christian homes, we should hope and expect that their experience will be like that of David and John the Baptist, never remembering a day without the joy of knowing Jesus in their hearts. Certainly, we should all be growing in grace, day by day and year by year. Our faith should mature as our bodies and minds mature. But some how, some way, God can work faith even in the heart of the smallest child. If you are blessed to grow up in a Christian home, you should always remember that even before you could speak or demonstrate your love for God, He

had already claimed you and declared His love for you. Give God thanks for His mysterious and amazing grace to families!

—*Pastor Rich Lusk, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL*

PRAYER

Our gracious heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise, for you have made promises to our family. Those promises include loving and caring for us, and filling us with the presence of your Holy Spirit, even from birth. Help us to receive the kingdom of your Son as a little child, and to rejoice in the Savior’s presence, as John the Baptist did so long ago, even in his mother’s womb. Teach us to know and remember your faithfulness to thousands of generations, and help us to respond to the grace you have given us in your Son with whole-hearted trust and obedience. AMEN.

ADVENT APPLICATION

Discuss how God has demonstrated his graciousness to your family. Can any family members remember a time when they did not trust and love Jesus as Savior? How has God shown His faithfulness to you (or your children) even from the womb? What are some ways that your family can receive children in your church in the name of Jesus (Mt. 18:5)?