

The Christmas Story According to Matthew
4 Dec. 2016

(Scene: Small table, covered with books and papers, at center stage. Two chairs by the table. Matthew enters from back of house after Children's Sermon and begins making his way down the aisle.)

Reader: The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1, verse 1. "The book of the beginning of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham . . .

(Knocking sound, as of someone at a door)

Matthew: Yes, yes, I'm coming! Just a moment. I'm not as fast as I used to be. *(Opens door)* Mark! I was hoping it would be you! Come in, come in. I've finished looking over the book you gave me. It's marvelous. We've been saying for years that we needed to write down the story of Jesus' life, but none of us have ever gotten around to it – and you've done a splendid job. Come in, have a seat. No, you've captured the heart of the good news, even Jesus' personality. It's magnificent. I love everything that you've written.

But, if you don't mind some advice, are you sure that you've said everything that *should* be said. For instance, isn't that ending rather abrupt? Shouldn't you say a little more about the risen Christ? Or again, except for that parable section you don't have much of Jesus' teaching. He did spend most of his time teaching, you know. In fact I've got a collection of his teachings somewhere in here that could be worked into your story *(Shuffles through papers)* Oh, bother, where is it? I'm always losing that book. Well, it's somewhere.

But even before all that, what about Jesus' birth? You start Jesus' story with John the Baptist, and Jesus appears already fully grown. There's nothing about where he came from, no mention of what happened first. That's a terrible omission, you know. People need to realize that Jesus was from the tribe of Abraham, from the royal line of David. In fact, they need to know that he descended not only from prophets and kings but also from outcasts and foreigners and sinners – Tamar and Rahab the prostitute and Ruth the Moabitess, even Bathsheba. If I were writing the story of Jesus, I'd start out with a genealogy.

Well, it may sound *bo-oring* to you, but it's still important. Christians need to know where Jesus came from and why, of all nations on earth, he came to this one – a Jew. Have you ever heard how Jesus was born, Mark? It was a complete surprise to everyone, but for all that, it was straight out of scripture . . .

Reader: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:18-21)

Matthew: You see? It’s all there in scripture. You’ve read the book of Isaiah, haven’t you? When Isaiah met Ahaz at the upper pool, he spoke this prophecy – for his own time, but oh so much more for ours: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they will name him Emmanuel.” *Emmanuel!* You know what that means! Come on, you’ve been to Sabbath School! “God Among Us.” Seven hundred years ago Isaiah spoke it.

Reader: When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son, and he named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25)

Matthew: Jesus. Yehoshua, which means: He will save. And we need to include information like that, Mark. You know, the church of Jesus Christ is changing, even within our lifetime. There are already more Gentiles than Jews. Well, you know that. You’ve traveled with Paul and worked as Peter’s secretary in Rome. And this change is good. It’s what Jesus wanted. But we have to sure that when we change we don’t forget where we came from. For instance, when I call Jesus “Son of David,” you know what that means. Any Jew knows what that means. But do the Gentile Christians in Corinth know that? It means that he is *king!*

We must never forget that, for all his humble origins, for all his self-sacrifice, Jesus is King, deserving all the homage due to a great king. In fact, here’s one story you may not have heard from his birth . . .

Reader: In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” (Matthew 2:1-2)

Matthew: Did you catch that about the star? The Moabite prophet Balaam wrote about it, as far back as the time of Moses: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near – a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.”

Reader: When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. (Matthew 2:3-4)

Matthew: You know where that is, don’t you? Gracious, what *are* they teaching them in the schools these days? Bethlehem, of course! The prophet Micah, from Isaiah’s day, wrote: “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

Are you serious? You've never heard the story of the wise men from the East? Am I the only one who remembers that story? That's why need to write it down. So, anyway, they went to Herod. Of course, going to Herod to ask about a new king was not such a good thing for Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus . . .

Reader: Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (Matthew 2:7-12)

Matthew: You see? Just as when God protected David in the wilderness, when King Saul sought to kill him, so God protected the new anointed king, the new Son of David, from King Herod.

So what happened next? Listen. This may be the most important thing yet. Joseph had another dream, warning him that Herod would try to kill Jesus, so he took Mary and the child and fled to Egypt. To Egypt.

What does that make you think of? That's right. Our ancestors fled to Egypt, too, and it was when God brought us out of Egypt that we became God's people. As the prophet Hosea says, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

And now, in our day, God has done it again. See? The world changes. Threats change. Enemies change. Salvation doesn't change. Once again, God would bring his son out of Egypt, in a new Exodus. And Jesus would be the new Moses. You've heard the scripture before, from the last book of the law – There, God promises, "I will raise up for them a prophet like Moses from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command."

This is why the Son of God was born to *this* people. Not because Jews are better than anyone else. Not because God loves us more – as much as some people want to believe that – but because we are the people to whom God had already shown his great love and mercy and power and salvation. We are the people who were chosen to bear his name and to *remember*. We are the people who have been taught to remember.

Every time we gather around the seder table at Passover – the lamb, the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs – every time the oldest son asks "What do these things mean?" and the father tells the story again, we remember that God is a great deliverer. Jehoshua, God will save.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere to give thanks to you,
Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

In love you made us for yourself;
in love you drew us back to yourself when we wandered away.

In love you delivered us from slavery with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
in love you brought us safely through deep waters as if on dry ground,
in love you fed us and cared for us in the barren wastes.

In love you walked beside us – God Among Us – and led us into the promised land of
your grace.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

We remember. I remember. I remember the night before he gave himself up for us – as
we his followers were gathered around the table for that seder meal of remembrance –
he took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, gave it to us, and said: “Take, eat;
this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Then, when the supper was over he took the cup gave thanks to God, gave it to us,
and said: “Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out
for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in
remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ’s offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.
By your Spirit, perfect us,
by making us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,

until Christ comes in final victory,
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.
Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy church,
all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father,
now and forever. **Amen.**

The Gospel of Mark is all about the Kingdom of God. Everything has changed! Everything is new! Will we proclaim the kingdom or will we let it pass us by? But the Gospel of Matthew gives us perspective. Matthew accepts everything in Mark – even uses that gospel as his own outline – but Matthew slows things down. Before we hurry off to change the world, Matthew seems to say, remember where we came from. Our crises may seem overwhelming and new to us today, but remember. Remember. Remember that God has been here before, God Among Us. God has saved his people before; God will save his people again. Thanks be to God. Emmanuel.