



JESUS, *Messiah*



**2020 ADVENT BIBLE READING
AND DEVOTIONAL GUIDE**

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Jesus, *Messiah*

Who is Jesus? Matthew was trying to answer that very question when he wrote the gospel of Matthew back in the first century. Who Jesus is remains an important question here in the 21st century. Who you understand Jesus to be is a huge question.

I have often found the analogy of looking through a telescope vs. a microscope very helpful. When I look at an item through a microscope, I am looking at something very small (like a cell), trying to make it bigger so that I can see it. When I look at something through a telescope, I am looking at something very large (like a star), trying to bring it closer to me so that I can comprehend it better.

God is unfathomably huge, and we need the telescope of the Bible to bring him closer to our view. We need help understanding God better, particularly through Jesus, the Messiah. My prayer is that, through this study of Matthew 1-2, Jesus will come into better view for you. I pray that the greatness and majesty and condescension of God's Son will overwhelm you with joy and delight this Christmas, as you grow to know him better and love him more.

Thanking God for his indescribable gift,
Craig Johnson
Adult Disciple-Making Pastor
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Monday, Nov 30

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

Welcome to the first day and the first week of our 2020 Advent Devotional Guide. We will work our way through Matthew 1-2 in the next four weeks, one section at a time. May the Lord bless, teach and encourage you as you read and reflect.

As we look at the first 17 verses of the book of Matthew this week, you might have two questions: Why? How? Why would I want to spend a week looking at a genealogy?! How could there be any spiritual significance for me in these verses? Those are natural questions, and good ones. At the end of this week I would encourage you to consider what you learned from these 17 verses about the identity of Jesus.

The best place to start is to think of these verses like a résumé. A résumé is a short account of one's career and qualifications, according to Merriam-Webster. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew is a short account of his qualifications, qualifications that existed before his birth. Jews kept genealogical résumés to establish a person's heritage, inheritance, legitimacy, and rights, according to the Jewish historian Josephus.

Matt. 1:1-17 is Jesus' résumé, a legal document to establish Jesus' legitimacy. Someone who made the claims that Jesus makes could not just appear from nowhere, he had to have legitimate background to establish his identity. Instead of asking yourself Why? or How? when you read the verses, the question that Matthew is answering in these verses is Who? Who is this Jesus? "The whole gospel of Matthew asks and the whole gospel of Matthew tells who this is" (Daniel Doriani).

Who is Jesus? How would you answer that question for yourself? Matthew wrote for everyone who would read this book, this gospel, after him, to help us answer that question. He wrote for you and me, which is so amazing! We learn truth about Jesus starting with verse 1. Do you believe the truth of this gospel? Has it changed you? I hope that you are changed through these short thoughts each day. Allow God to change you, even through a genealogy!

Tuesday, Dec 1

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1) These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. (Genesis 2:4) This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. (Genesis 5:1)

Genesis is a book of beginnings, as you can see from the verses above. Matthew is a book of beginnings as well, because the word for genealogy has as its root the word *genesis*, beginnings. Matthew saw that his book (*the genealogy/genealogy of Jesus Christ*) was a record of new beginnings, beginnings that were planned for from of old.

Genesis first begins with creation. This was obviously the beginning of heaven and earth. After the earth was created, there were still beginnings to be made. The first humans were created, Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were expelled from the garden, but still beginnings were being started. They had children, the world was flooded, and Noah began again. Finally, God chose Abram to father his chosen people, another beginning.

All those beginnings, from Genesis on through Malachi, pointed toward the ultimate beginning to be found in Jesus Christ. All those people, from Abraham to Joseph and Mary, all pointed towards the baby Jesus and the new beginning that he would bring. Paul states it well in 2 Corinthians 5:17: **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

When we trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, something new begins in us. We humbly submit, through repentance and confession, to the leadership of Jesus over our life, and he does something brand new in us. Think back in your own life. Who was instrumental in helping the work of Jesus to happen in you? How did it start? Are you the beginning of a spiritual genealogy in your family or friends? Or is today the day that God is going to start a new beginning in you?

Wednesday, Dec 2

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

If you asked a Jewish person, who are two of the most important Old Testament people, many of them would say Abraham and David. Large sections of the Old Testament are devoted to each of these men, who were chosen by God for their roles in leading God's people. These men are in the right bloodline that qualifies someone to be the Messiah. Each of these men pointed to someone greater.

Jesus is called the son of David nine times in Matthew, according Daniel Doriani. David was a great king, but he didn't start out as a great man. He wasn't the first-born son; in fact, he was number eight. Even his father had him out tending the flock when Samuel came looking for a king among his sons. It would be years after David was anointed by Samuel, years of running from Saul, before David finally became king.

The first century Jews were waiting for a king to come in the line of David to save them as a king would save a persecuted and captive people. What they didn't realize though was, like David, Jesus would come in an unexpected way.

Abraham is the other prominent name listed at the start of this book of beginnings. He was the father of the Jewish people, but he started out as a pagan. Abraham worshipped other gods before God called him. It is important to remember that Jesus is in the line of Abraham. This would be critical to the résumé of a Jewish Messiah. It's also important to remember that God's promise to Abraham was that he would bless all the peoples of the earth.

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... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:2–3 ESV).

There is more to these two men than meets the eye, just as there is more to Jesus than we first might think. Jesus the King saves his people in a much different way. Jesus the son of father Abraham is the Savior of people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). What a great Savior!

Thursday, Dec 3

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

Résumés are important for what they include, but also for what they don't include. Jesus' résumé is not the most ideal example of sterling heritage that would highlight the importance of Jesus. In fact, the résumé of Jesus is an example of many of the least likely people you would include.

First, we have a number of sons who were not the first-born in their family. Jacob, Judah, and David usurped the normal birth order to become leaders. We have five women listed, even though these genealogies normally included men only. Matthew seemed to include the least important women, while leaving out other important ones. Three or four of those women are foreigners, not Jewish people. There is a murderer (David) who had a son out of adultery, not to mention the situation of Tamar and the many wives of Solomon. This doesn't even take into account all the wicked kings listed throughout.

What was Matthew thinking? What was God thinking to provide this heritage for Jesus? Consider what Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1:27-31:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

God can choose and use whomever he wants to accomplish what he desires. God often chooses the foolish, weak and despised so that we can't take the credit. God alone deserves the glory because it is all because of Christ that we are what we are, and we can do what we can do. Boast in the Lord that, in spite of yourself, your background, or your difficulties, God chose you and loves you, Christian!

Friday, Dec 4

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

Is there anything in your family that is passed down from generation to generation? Maybe it's a wedding dress, a piece of furniture, a house, or a work of art. In a family, only the heir receives these things that are passed down. In the Old Testament, covenants, which are agreements between God and people, were passed down. These concepts are important and help give meaning to this genealogy.

One of God's first covenants was with Abraham: **Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 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. 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"** (Genesis 12:1–3).

Paul also called it, in a broad sense, "the gospel" (Galatians 3:8). This "gospel" is further specified by the Davidic Covenant, the promise made in 2 Samuel 7:12, 13, where David is promised that one of his descendants would establish a forever kingdom: **When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.**

The promises made by God to bless all nations and peoples through the kingdom of God are all fulfilled in Jesus. When Matthew states that Jesus is the son of Abraham and of David, he is saying that Jesus is their heir in the family line. Jesus receives the promises made to Abraham and David.

Paul gets really excited when he writes about this in 2 Corinthians 1:20: **For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.** We get all the benefits of the promises made that are fulfilled in Jesus! We can say as well, Amen, glory to God for all that God is for us in Jesus this Christmas! We are heirs to all the promises of God, through Jesus, the ultimate heir.

Saturday, Dec 5

*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.
(Matthew 1:17)*

I never really thought there was much in this last verse of the passage that we are looking at this week. It seemed to me that Matthew was just summarizing for us what he said over the first sixteen verses in order to bring this section to a close, and that's all. Often, though, a summary can bring to light what is hidden in all the details. Matthew does that here.

Matthew highlights here three important eras and points in history: Abraham to David, David to the exile, the exile to Christ. Frederick Dale Bruner helpfully suggests that we look at this history like the shape of the letter "N." Just like the shape of the letter N, history heads upward from Abraham to David, then it heads downward from David to the Babylonian exile, and then it heads upward again to Jesus.

Jesus came just at the right time, when history was made new. **But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law** (Galatians 4:4). Douglas Sean O'Donnell said that God designed history around the coming of Jesus. Everything, even the direction that history was heading, pointed toward Jesus.

The time when Jesus came was a dark, hopeless period in history. The Jews had not heard from God for over 400 hundred years. Then God invaded time in an entirely unique, special and planned way. Just as each name leads to the next in this list, so time moved forward to its appointed climax in Jesus.

We are in a similarly hopeless time, it seems. Time is moving forward to a purposeful end, the coming of Jesus again. As we reflect back over this genealogy, we see that God was moving and working, bringing history to its appointed new beginning in Jesus. We can have hope, because in a dark and difficult time to ours, God was still at work.

Where are you at in your genealogy? What is your influence on eternity and future generations through Jesus? Pray and reflect. Ask God to help you love God, love others, and serve the world more faithfully, for future generations.

Sunday, Dec 6

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. (Matthew 1:18)

This week we will be working through Matt. 1:18-25 as we consider what one person has called the origin of Jesus. Read Matt. 1:18-25 each day this week and ask God to be magnified in your life.

Surprise, Mary's pregnant! There are certainly many variations of how Mary could get pregnant, but this is the most extreme. From Joseph's perspective, all his assumptions were negative – Mary must have done something wrong to get pregnant. We will look at Joseph's response tomorrow in the next verse, but today let's think about the conception of Jesus.

Jesus' birth or origin teaches us two incredibly important truths about Jesus, truths that are so important that we could not receive salvation from God without them. First, the virgin birth shows us that *Jesus is fully a man, a human being, yet without sin*. Mary was born with a sin nature, just like everyone else who has ever been born after Adam and Eve. Because Jesus was born of Mary, but by the agency of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is "guarded from sin." The Holy Spirit interceded in a miraculous way and caused Mary to be pregnant. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus the holy Son of God is incarnated or invested with a human nature, but not a sinful nature. Jesus is fully a man.

Second, Jesus had to be fully a man, *but also Jesus had to be fully God* to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus is the pre-existent Son of God, who lived on earth as a man, ascended into heaven, and continues to sit at the right hand of God. This was part of God's promise which is spelled out for us in places like Leviticus 26:12 - **And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people**. God walked among us in the person of Jesus.

Jesus came as a baby and lived as a man to understand and empathize with our weaknesses, and to be a sinless sacrifice for us (see 2 Cor. 5:21, Heb. 2:14-18). Jesus is God incarnate, come as a man, with the power to destroy sin and death and hell and Satan (1 Cor. 15:21-28, 54-57). Praise God for sending his Son to be a man!

Monday, Dec 7

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. (Matthew 1:19)

Today we get insight into Joseph, the adopting father of Jesus. In Matthew, the story of the origin of Jesus is told from the perspective of Joseph. Joseph was not Jesus' biological father. Jesus didn't have a human father; he was the Son of God. Joseph, though, still had a critical role in the life of Jesus as his adoptive father.

It's important to clarify the first century engagement and marriage customs. Joseph and Mary, by our standards, were engaged but not yet married officially. In verse 24 we see that Joseph later took Mary as his wife. At this point they were not yet married, but engagement was as serious and as binding in that culture as marriage, requiring a kind of divorce to end the engagement.

We need to understand that Joseph kept the law. He obeyed the Old Testament law, which told him to do something more severe than mere divorce, but Roman law would not permit stoning. Joseph was a just man, he followed and kept what the law prescribed in the case of sexual immorality.

Yet, Joseph was unwilling to put Mary to shame. A public divorce, known to all, would embarrass, humiliate and shame Mary, and Joseph would not do such a thing to her. He loved and cared for her. Although he felt like he had to do what the law required, Joseph's compassion led him to seek out another, more private option.

Joseph loved and obeyed God, yet he wasn't a legalist. He understood that God did not delight in punishing his people, rather God wanted to give the people a path for obedience. Joseph wanted to patiently seek what was best to do in regard to Mary. He had no idea that an angel would speak to him in a dream, because he did not yet know the amazing role God had for him for such a time as this.

God let Joseph struggle with this decision before he spoke to him. What impact does your relationship with God have on your big and small decisions? God often lets us struggle with decisions before he reveals a better way. Wait, test your plans against God's will, and honor God as Joseph did, even in uncertain times.

Tuesday, Dec 8

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."

(Matthew 1:20)

We don't usually focus on this angelic visit at Christmas time. The usual focus is on the angel's visit to Mary, told in Luke. This, though, is an equally important visit from an angel. God rewarded Joseph's attitude of waiting to seek the correct decision with a visit from an angel. This angel gave Joseph some amazing news, which we will focus on today and tomorrow.

The angel first spoke to him as Joseph, son of David. Although Joseph wasn't the biological father of Jesus, Jesus' adoption into their family would make Jesus an heir of David. God miraculously brought Jesus into the right family. Joseph made Jesus a descendant of David, as God had planned.

Then the angel said, things are not as they seem. Just as God made the initiative to intercede in Mary's life with a miraculous conception, so God intercedes with Joseph through the angel. God had to intercede with Joseph so that Joseph would in fact take Jesus in as his adopted son. Joseph was fearful to keep Mary until he heard this news.

It was miraculous news! Mary's baby is not the result of sin. God has intervened. The Holy Spirit had brought about Mary's pregnancy, it was not the result of sin! Joseph need not fear what happened to Mary. Joseph need not fear ending his relationship with Mary. Joseph must fear and trust God, because the Holy Spirit has done a miraculous work in Mary!

There was no other situation in the history of the world with which Joseph could compare what was happening to him. All he could do was, in humility, trust the Holy Spirit and the angel's words. Just like Mary, that's what Joseph did. It seems like trust in the face of insurmountable odds is the most difficult trust to have. But that's what God called Joseph to do - trust in God. God calls us to trust him in the same way. Are you willing to depend on God by faith?

Wednesday, Dec 9

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

If you think it was difficult for Joseph to trust what the angel said in verse 20 (yesterday), imagine how much more difficult it was for Joseph to trust what the angel said in this verse!

Joseph could get immediate answers and make immediate decisions as a result of what the angel said to him in verse 20. Joseph could go talk to Mary, and Mary could confirm that the angel visited her as well. Joseph could change his mind and not divorce Mary because of what he learned. His faith could be verified pretty quickly.

Even the first phrase in this verse would be verified in a few months. The baby would come, and Joseph would see that he had a son. After he was born, he could name him Jesus. This could all be very quickly verified, within a matter of months.

But what did the angel mean by the words, **he will save his people from their sins**? No person could do that, could he? The Jewish people had a temple and a sacrificial system. Sacrifices had to be offered daily, weekly and yearly for sins. These sacrifices didn't take care of sins completely, because they had to be continually offered. God never said anything about a human sacrifice, did he? How could a person save his people from their sins?

One man, Adam, brought sin into the world. Could one man save from sin? Yes! Joseph would not immediately fathom the meaning of the angel's words. Through the next 33 years, Joseph would come to learn what the angel meant. His son would live a sinless life, die a sacrificial death, and rise again to defeat sin and death. Thank God for giving Joseph enough faith to believe even though he could not see and understand.

Thursday, Dec 10

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:22-23)

Promises, promises. We have all had promises made to us. Parents, friends, advertising, doctors all make promises of different kinds. No one is able to keep all their promises to us, just as we can't keep all our promises to others. Disappointment results.

God keeps all his promises.

Think about that for a minute. God keeps all his promises.

A number of times in Matthew 1-2 we see phrases like this phrase we find here in verse 22: **this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken**. Let's look at this short phrase and see what it means for us this Christmas.

In the very first verse of Hebrews, the author writes this: **Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets** (Hebrews 1:1). Throughout the Old Testament God spoke words to all the people listed in the genealogy in Matthew 1, and many more people besides. The whole Old Testament contains God speaking to his people and revealing to them who he is and what he is going to do.

The Old Testament is more than God speaking to people, it points forward to what God will reveal in the New Testament, through Jesus. St. Augustine said it this way: "The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed." The Bible is one book in two parts. Through prophecy, God speaks in the Old Testament about what he plans to do. In the New Testament he reveals those plans in the person of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:2 gives the contrast to 1:1: **but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world** (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus is God's word to us, his spoken, final word in the form of a man. Jesus is God's promises fulfilled. Jesus is God's "YES" to everything that he has said he will do (see 2 Cor. 1:20). Praise God for his promises fulfilled to us through Immanuel, God with us!

Friday, Dec 11

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)." (Matthew 1:22-23)

One of my favorite phrases and concepts in the New Testament is Immanuel – God with us. God's promise to be with his people, to be their God, is as old as Genesis, and will stretch to the end of time, as we will see in Revelation. In fact, this promise is at the heart of all that God wants to do, as we will see throughout the Bible.

God's presence with his people began in the garden, when God had close fellowship with Adam and Eve. That fellowship was broken by sin, so God established a covenant with his people. The heart of covenant in Genesis 17 is that God would be our God, and we would be his people.

The promise of God's presence continued in the instructions for the tabernacle, when God promised to dwell among his people (Ex. 29:45). God's presence was one of the blessing of obedience in the giving of the law. **And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people** (Lev. 26:12).

God's people sinned against him greatly in the time of the prophets, so God withdrew his presence from his people, as illustrated in Ezekiel 11. Through the prophets, God looks forward to the future when his dwelling place will be restored among his people (Ezek. 37:27-28; Zech. 2:10).

Paul understood that through the Holy Spirit, God can now dwell with his church corporately, and in believers individually. He quotes Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel 37 to communicate that God's dwelling place is now with us personally. He dwells with every believer and the church in a close and intimate way.

The final goal will be our greatest joy - God's dwelling with man! **And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God"** (Rev. 21:3). The coming of Jesus, Immanuel, assures us that God will fulfill his promise. Rejoice in God's presence with you today, or ask him to be with you now, if you have never humbled yourself before God.

Saturday, Dec 12

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.

And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24–25)

Joseph obeyed. Not a lot of hoopla or fanfare. He woke up and did what the angel commanded. A few words come to my mind after studying this passage.

Faith. Like Mary, Joseph by faith trusted what the angel said. The angel appeared to Mary when she was awake; Joseph's vision was in a dream. There was no dialogue between Joseph and the angel. God confirmed in Joseph's heart the truth of the visit so that there was no doubt. Joseph still could have disobeyed, like Jonah did when he ran from God, but he didn't. Joseph simply trusted God's words from the angel and obeyed.

Submission. Joseph in humility submitted himself to God's plan and God's words. He wasn't prepared for this. He didn't plan to be the adopted father of Jesus. There was no training course, no models to look to. He simply gave his life to follow the will of God, fully and completely without reservation.

Fear and shame. He was afraid to divorce, afraid for her and himself for what people would say when they heard. He was also afraid to keep her, because people would gossip more if they stayed together even though she was pregnant. The unfounded shame would be evident. He could avoid more shame by divorcing Mary, but he didn't. Joseph did not let fear and shame rule his life.

"Joseph illustrates the capacity for difficult obedience that flows from the knowledge that Jesus is our Immanuel, God with us, to bless us" (Doriani). The triune God of the universe planned to work through Joseph, and he asked Joseph to trust him. God asks each of us to trust him as well. God wants to work through you and me. Are you willing by faith to let him use you?

Sunday, Dec 13

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:1-2)

This week we will be reading and thinking about Matthew 2:1-12. As you read those verses each day, meditate on this amazing visit to the child Jesus.

We hear the song "We Three Kings" at Christmastime and often think of three kings visiting the baby in a manger, but that's not really what happened. First, this entourage was composed of Magi, not kings. Magi, or Wise Men, were people similar to Daniel of the Old Testament. These men studied the stars and interpreted dreams, much like Daniel. Unlike Daniel, they were pagans, not Jews, and may have been looked down upon by Jews because of their association with astrology and magic.

The Wise Men had some knowledge of the prophecy of Balaam: **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...** (Numbers 24:17). Even though they didn't believe in God, the birth of a great king, told in the stars, fascinated and attracted their attention.

The Wise Men followed the star – pagans from another land, probably Babylon. It's just like God to include the story of people from a far-off nation among the first to visit Jesus. Matthew includes their story to emphasize that the good news of Jesus' birth is for all people, not just one specific group of people.

The wise men came to worship. That was their stated purpose when they first stopped to ask in Jerusalem about the star and the king. They worshipped someone greater than themselves and gave gifts to this king. Did they understand exactly who Jesus was, either then or later? Probably. But I hope that God led them to Bethlehem to change their lives and save them forever. That's my hope for you as well, that God will cause you to fall down and worship Jesus this Christmas, again or for the first time.

Monday, Dec 14

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. (Matthew 2:3-4)

Matthew 2:1-12 isn't about three kings, as we learned yesterday, but about two kings – Herod and Jesus a big king and a little king. Which is which? Think about it.

What brings fear to your heart? Why would news of a baby cause fear in the heart of a king, or in any person?

Herod didn't become a king because of his heritage or family line. He wasn't elected king; he was appointed by the Roman leaders to be king or ruler of this area. Herod was self-conscious and paranoid about his position, so much so that he had close relatives put to death. Herod was king, and he was fearful that there were greater kings than him. He was the little king.

Jesus was baby. News of a baby born to be a king wasn't normal. The Bible told of a king, prophesied in Micah and other places (see verses 5-6). This baby could be a challenge to Herod's role, privilege and control. Herod was fearful of what might result.

Herod felt fear and hostility to this news, much like what we feel when we lose control of our lives. This is a reasonable response to someone who wants to be King of our lives. "Hostility, however, is quite reasonable, given that we are naturally inclined to oppose God and his ways and his Son, and given the very controversial claims of Christ. If he is King, you and I are not (Douglas Sean O'Donnell)."

You and I are like Herod. At times, maybe frequently, we don't want Jesus to be King of our lives. I want to run this part of my life, or that area of my life, my own way. Having a King means that I need to submit to his authority and acknowledge his control of my life. Either Jesus is King or I am king, there are no two ways about it.

Herod's response should challenge us and cause you and I to consider whether we are truly bowing to Jesus consistently, daily, moment by moment. Am I fearful and hostile to God because I want to be in charge? As you prepare for Christmas, think about how you regularly respond to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and whether you are the little king responding to the Lord of all.

Tuesday, Dec 15

And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" (Matthew 2:4–6)

Yesterday we thought about the response of Herod to the questions of the Wise Men. Today let's look at the response of the religious leaders.

When the Wise Men came to Herod, Herod had to go ask other people, because he didn't know "Where is he born king of the Jews?" *What king of the Jews? He was supposed to be born near here, I know nothing about that.* Herod, not a religious person, was clueless, so he went to ask some religious people for the answer.

Commentator Douglas Sean O'Donnell said that Herod went to find the best *Jeopardy* contestants to help him out. When they heard the question, they all tried to buzz in at the same time. It was easy – *Star prophecies for 100, Alex.* They didn't even have to think to come up with Micah 5:2 (see Matt. 2:6). It was Bethlehem. They all knew the answer.

What did the religious leaders do after that? Apparently nothing. They were totally indifferent. They were not curious. They didn't ask more questions of Herod or the Wise Men. They didn't send a representative to Bethlehem to check it out. Nothing.

Maybe your response to King Jesus isn't hostility, but is it apathy or indifference? You have heard the Christmas story often, possibly since you were little, but it makes no difference in your life, it doesn't even disrupt your schedule.

Keith Green was a well-known Christian singer when I was in high school, and one of his most powerful and challenging songs is *Asleep in the Light*. One of the lines to that song says,
*The world is sleeping in the dark,
That the church just can't fight,
'cause it's asleep in the light!*

Don't sleep in the light this Christmas. Don't hide this news under a bushel, let it shine! Fight the apathy and indifference that the religious leaders had two thousand years ago and allow this news to make you different, not indifferent.

Wednesday, Dec 16

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" (Matthew 2:5-6)

God had a plan, right down to the place where Jesus would be born.

The Magi, probably coming from Babylon, journeyed to Jerusalem, as the star led them. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they started to ask around - they didn't know where to go next. They followed the star because of the prophecy in Number 24:17, but they didn't know the place.

Micah, one of the prophets, prophesied about his birth. Micah wrote of the place where the ruler would be born, more than 700 years before he was born. Bethlehem was a small, unlikely place, but also an important place. Another unlikely ruler had been born in Bethlehem in the past, and that was David.

Micah 5:2 says it this way: **But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.** Micah was merely announcing a plan that had been made in eternity past, proclaimed by Micah and reinforced by Matthew.

Jesus was born here not only to fulfill the prophecy, but also to show that he would be a ruler in the line of David, and not just any ruler, the final and greatest ruler. He would be born in the same city as the great ruler of the past, David.

The intricacy of God's plan always amazes me! The founding of Bethlehem, the birth of David, the prophecy of Micah, the trip of the Wise Men following the movement of the star, and the knowledge of the religious leaders all were steps laid out by the Ancient of Days to testify to the greatness of Jesus. Praise God for his wonderful plan!

Thursday, Dec 17

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. (Matthew 2:7-9)

Psalm 2 is a helpful place to start as we look at this passage. **Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."** (Psalm 2:1-3) Why indeed!

From Herod in the first century to leaders in the 21st century, people plot to overthrow the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, yet he is still on his throne. Notice how Herod attempted to get rid of this king.

He first entertained the Wise Men's questions with the answer he had obtained. Then he brought them in secretly. Why secretly? Herod didn't want to let on that he was worried or angry. He pretended kindness and even delight at this news. Herod made it seem like he was happy, truly intrigued and excited to hear of this birth.

Herod also didn't want the people to know. Plots must be kept secret to risk any type of accountability. The smaller the circle of knowledge, the easier it is to keep secret.

Notice what Herod said in verse 8: **Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.**

Every word but the last two in this sentence was the truth. He wanted them to search diligently, to find the baby, to bring him so that he could come.

Worship was not on Herod's mind. Worship in the Greek language means to bow the knee or prostrate before someone. Herod would never bow to God or his Son Jesus.

Herod must have been somewhat convincing, because the Wise Men listened to him. God used Herod, even though Herod would never agree to be used by God. We see at the end of the passage that Herod didn't succeed. God's plan is not thwarted by deception.

God's response to Herod, and to all who rage against him, is this: **As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. 7 I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession"** (Psalm 2:6-8). Praise the sovereign Lord of all!

Friday, Dec 18

*When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
(Matthew 2:10)*

In Ecclesiastes Solomon wrote **I commend joy...** (8:15). If you have ever read Ecclesiastes that might surprise you. I believe from the Bible that joy is known and treasured and valued most by those who have also known and valued pain and sorrow and difficulty. The Preacher, Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, is an excellent example of this truth.

The Wise Men may have been similar people to Solomon. No one knows the life of the Wise Men. They seemed to be people who were waiting, searching, and often disappointed. They were looking for some reason to hope that was beyond themselves. As Pascal would say, they had this God-shaped hole in their hearts that they were trying to fill. Even on their trip they had made it as far as Jerusalem, only to be disappointed again for a time.

Then, as they left Jerusalem, they saw the star again. Their words are very difficult to translate because the English just doesn't seem to capture their joy, maybe because words themselves cannot describe their joy! They had mega-great joyful joy! Remember who is mega-rejoicing and who is not. Pagan Babylonian astrologers are overjoyed at finding the star again, whereas no one else seems to care.

I cannot help but believe that these non-believers were by faith trusting in God, as the angels said and prophesied to the shepherds. **And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (Luke 2:11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."** (Luke 2:10–11) This was the best news they had ever heard. It was and is for *all people*. The Wise Men were overjoyed to find Jesus, see him, and believe in Jesus – how about you?

Saturday, Dec 19

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

If you read yesterday's devotional, you will remember that we learned of the unbelieving Wise Men expressing believing trust in Jesus, by faith. J.C. Ryle says it this way, "We read of no greater faith than this in the whole volume of the Bible." What is normal response to believing trust in Jesus? Worship and giving.

I love how Douglas Sean O'Donnell explains this passage:

"On Tuesday, January 6, twelve days after Christmas, the Western church celebrates Epiphany. The word *epiphany* comes from a Greek word that means "to manifest" or "to show," and on this date the church has traditionally commemorated the visit of the magi and the "epiphany." What epiphany? God's manifestation to the Gentiles. God showed himself in the person of Christ to the Gentiles. That's what that holiday is all about... on that day, before you pack away your Nativity set, celebrate by looking closely at this passage again and noticing how the whole scene is filled with scandal. We have a teenage mother, a child conceived out of wedlock, lowly and dirty and usually irreligious shepherds (as well as lowly and dirty and certainly irreligious animals) and then ... the magi—a bunch of 'Star-led Wisards,' magicians of sorts, Gentile sinners. This scene depicts so perfectly the good news of the gospel of the kingdom. This good news is for all people, even the 'least likely candidates for God's love.'"

Those least deserving people – shepherds, Wise Men, and us – we have been given the gift of receiving this good news. We should rejoice as well and worship him. God has saved us eternally, saved us from so much, blessed us with so much grace. Let's worship Jesus with heart and soul, body and mind.

Let's also give to him, again and daily, ourselves. Let's give to him what is valuable to us because we value Jesus more. I don't know what that is for you, but when we are led to worship and adore Jesus, God leads us to return our worship through giving in joy.

Sunday, Dec 20

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:12)

Protection. God protected his Son throughout his entire life, until his time was right. We have our first indication of this truth in this verse.

The Wise Men had gone through Jerusalem. They had met Herod and been given direction by him, both on where to go and to return news of the child back to Herod. After their visit, before they left Bethlehem, they slept the night.

It wasn't a good night's sleep. After a day of tremendous joy they experienced warning in their hearts. During the night, just as the angel visited Joseph, so he visited the Wise Men in their sleep. He warned them of Herod. Herod didn't desire to worship the child. They may or may not have known Herod's plan, but they learned in their dreams that Herod was not to be trusted.

The child was chief in their thoughts as they set out for their journey home by a different route. These Wise Men listened to spiritual direction from God. God had led them to follow the star and right to the child named Jesus. God had not let them down before, and he would not let them down now.

God had planned all this to happen, and nothing thwarts God's plans. Paul tells us that Jesus came at the right time: **But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law** (Galatians 4:4). Mark says the same about the life of Jesus, **the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel** (Mark 1:15).

Paul, again, makes the same point about Jesus' death and its purpose: **For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Romans 5:6–8).

God's plan of salvation and glory is never thwarted. God always accomplishes exactly what he plans to do. What an encouraging truth!

Monday, Dec 21

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Matthew 2:13–15)

Matthew 2:13-23 is not a typical passage that we focus on at Christmas. Matthew sees it as very important, though, so he includes it in his telling of the Christmas story. We will consider what God has to teach us as we approach Christmas Day.

As Matthew sets the scene, the Wise Men had just departed to go home another way, because of a warning in a dream. Probably the very next day or night God warned Joseph in a similar way. Joseph and Mary were rightly afraid, and they fled to Egypt during the night to protect the Christ Child.

Sinful Herod was used by our enemy to try to defeat God's plan by trying to kill Jesus, as we will see even more fully tomorrow as we look at the next few verses. Jesus would eventually grow to adulthood and die for our sins. God would win, not Satan. At this point, though, the baby Jesus needed to grow into a man to live a sinless life before he died a sacrificial death for our sins.

It is significant that the family ran to Egypt, because that illustrates how God foreshadowed the events of Matthew 2 in the Old Testament exodus from Egypt, according to Douglas Sean O'Donnell. Israel itself in the Old Testament was called God's son. Hosea 11:1, quoted partially above, reads this way: **When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.** God loved his people as a son, and he continues to love us as a son, in and through his one and only Son.

Jesus is the one and only Son who embodies the relationship the Father has with his children. Just as God called Israel his children out of Egypt, so he called his Son out of Egypt in this event. Jesus is the ultimate story of God bringing his people out of captivity into his promised land of a relationship with God and life with him forever. Thank you God for your rescue plan!

Tuesday, Dec 22

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." (Matthew 2:16–18)

This event, often called the slaughter of the innocents, is one of the most tragic events of Christmas. This passage highlights that life and death are part of the first Christmas. But just as the exiles returned to the promised land, so Jesus is ending our exile from God to bring us back home to him.

After the Wise Men tricked Herod, Herod was furious. Herod estimated when the star might have first appeared, then added a little time to determine which children to kill. He may have killed twenty to thirty innocent children in this horrible act. Jesus said, **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly** (John 10:10). This is the plan of our enemy, illustrated for us through the anger and hatred of Herod.

But there is hope. "Matthew is saying that with the coming of Jesus, the time of the exile is coming to a close! He hinted at it in the last verse of the genealogy (1:17). Now he alludes to it through the prophets. The tears shed by the mothers in Bethlehem inaugurate the reign of the one who will shed tears of blood for the forgiveness of sin and who will eventually, in the restoration of all things, wipe every tear away (Revelation 21:4)" (Douglas Sean O'Donnell).

Bethlehem and Calvary are intimately connected. They are each a place where tremendous spiritual battles were fought. This illustrates that *we need Christmas*, as Daniel Doriani writes. Yes, Christmas is a time to celebrate the beautiful birth of the baby Jesus. Don't forget that.

But ***we need Christmas***. Christmas signals God's decisive final action to defeat sin in this world and pay the penalty for our sins. Without Christmas there is no Calvary, no substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, no salvation, no hope. Christmas points out the serious nature of sin and the need for a Savior. Thank God for Christmas, we need it!

Wednesday, Dec 23

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene." (Matthew 2:19–23)

This is our final fulfillment passage in Matthew 1-2. We have seen fulfillment in 1:22-23, 2:5-6, 2:15, 2:17-18, and finally here. Those passages were straightforward, but what does Matthew mean here?

Unlike Bethlehem, there is no specific prophecy about Nazareth in the Old Testament. The town of Nazareth is never even named in the Old Testament. Commentators like Douglas Sean O'Donnell see a clue in Isaiah 11:1. **There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.** Jesse was the father of David, and the shoot from Jesse is David and his lineage that leads to Jesus.

We started with a genealogy in Matthew 1, and Matthew brings us back to the genealogy in chapter 2. The résumé of Jesus is pivotal for Jesus. Matthew is pointing out that everything, including town in which Jesus eventually grew up, highlights the last qualification in Jesus' birth and infancy. Let me explain.

The answer seems to be in the branch verse in Isaiah 11. The Hebrew word for branch is *neser*. In English we sometimes add the ending *polis* to a word to make the name of a city (*Minneapolis*, *Indianapolis*). In Hebrew you would add the ending *eth*. The City of the Branch would then be *neser/eth*, or Nazareth! Douglas Sean O'Donnell says it beautifully: "So, Matthew is saying that Jesus came from the city of David (Bethlehem) as well as from the people of David (Nazareth). Jesus is 'the branch.' Jesus is 'the Son of David.' The fact that he grew up in Nazareth as a Nazarene puts an exclamation point on this!"

God led Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for the census, to Egypt for protection, and to Nazareth to raise the boy Jesus, all part of God's plan to emphasize Jesus is the son of Abraham, the Son of David, and the Son of God. Rejoice in God's wonderful plan for you and me!

Thursday, Dec 24

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:22–23)

As we reflect over Matthew 1-2 today, on the day before we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let's look over these four weeks.

Daniel Doriani helpfully describes for us each of the four parts of these chapters. In the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17 we learned about the identity of Jesus. His résumé, from Abraham to his father Joseph, helps us to see the family line God preserved and maintained that led us to the one and only Son of God, who became a man for us and our salvation.

In Matthew 1:18-25, the birth of Jesus is described from the perspective of Joseph. Through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, God himself was incarnated or made comprehensible with human, bodily form. God became a man to be Immanuel, God with us. God became like us so that we could become like him, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Matthew 2:1-12 tells us of the adoration of Jesus. People, foreigners who probably had no previous knowledge of a Messiah, traveled hundreds of miles, following a star. They remembered a prophecy, they saw it displayed in the sky, and they followed the light in hopes of seeing a king. They were completely overjoyed when they arrived, so much so that they fell on their knees and adored Jesus in worship and through gifts.

Finally, we saw in Matthew 2:13-23 the protection of Jesus. God's plan for a Savior would not be thwarted through the acts of a king who hated God, just as all do who live in darkness. God saved his Son so that his Son could save his people – you and me.

Charles Wesley, the great hymnwriter, wrote words better than I could write to describe this *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*. Let me finish with a quote from that hymn:

<i>Love Divine, all love excelling,</i>	<i>Let us see Thy great salvation</i>
<i>Joy of heav'n, to earth come down;</i>	<i>Perfectly restored in Thee;</i>
<i>Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,</i>	<i>Changed from glory into glory</i>
<i>All Thy faithful mercies crown...</i>	<i>Till with Thee we take our place,</i>
<i>Finish, then, Thy new creation;</i>	<i>Till we cast our crowns before Thee,</i>
<i>Pure and spotless let us be;</i>	<i>Lost in wonder, love and praise.</i>

Tomorrow, I encourage to you to read Luke 2:1-20 as your Christmas Day devotional. Remember and celebrate tomorrow Christ's first coming and joyously anticipate his second coming!



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