

**Father Christmas, the father of Mercy**  
**Ps 89:1-4, Matt 1:1-6**

Well Brothers and Sisters, we have officially moved into the Christmas Season - when you arrived at church today you noticed that the Christmas decorations are up, we've changed the set design at the front of the sanctuary and we've started to incorporate Christmas music in our services.

I'm sure you've noticed the signs of the Christmas season elsewhere too – decorations and displays going up in the shopping malls, neighbors putting up their lights, and perhaps your kids or loved ones have already started giving you hints as to what they would like to get for a Christmas gift.

But there is another sure sign that the Christmas season has arrived as well – one that seems to have developed and become somewhat of a new tradition over the past fifteen years or so... and that is *"Christmas Controversies"*

These days it just wouldn't be Christmas without someone raising a fuss over whether people should say merry Christmas or happy holidays...

Or debating whether a Christmas tree should be put up at City Hall or not...

Or organizing a protest and boycott about whatever Starbucks has decided to print on their coffee cups at this time of year...

Or flooding your Facebook feed with all those *"Keep Christ in Christmas!"* posts which cause others to respond by posting those oh so witty social justice memes suggesting that we accomplish this by *"feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, forgiving the guilty"* and so on...

It just makes me feel warm and fuzzy all over with the Christmas Spirit! Not.

But seriously, there are some important issues at stake in the annual Christmas controversies, and certainly if Christmas is about anything it is about Jesus Christ.

Even the secularized version of Christmas with Santa Claus and elves and presents is based on the life of St. Nicholas, a bishop in the early church in Turkey, who had a reputation for being generous and giving secret gifts to the poor as part of being an obedient disciple of Jesus Christ.

So it's really very difficult to get away from the fact that Christmas is about Jesus Christ – though I understand why people might want to do so.

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:23 *“but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...”*

And brothers and sisters – it's very difficult to preach Christ crucified as Paul does, without first preaching Christ born...

In fact it's a bit difficult to make sense of Christ's crucifixion without any understanding his birth, and there's so much about who Jesus Christ is as Messiah and Savior that is established in and through his birth.

So – as I said – I understand why people would want to keep Christ out of Christmas... that is our sinful human nature manifesting itself.

You see friends the closer God gets to us – the more irritated and aggravated our sinful nature gets and you won't find God much closer to humanity than at Christmas time when we proclaim and celebrate the incarnation of God's Word taking on our human nature and being born of a woman.

So I understand why Christmas is controversial brothers and sisters, I get why people want to take Christ out of Christmas... but let's not waste time arguing with them about our rights or cultural battles or matters of freedom of religion, instead let's tell them why Christmas is about Christ in the first place.

And if we're going to do that – we need to firm up our conviction and belief that Christmas is about Christ... because Christ is about revealing who God is, and who we are.

There can never be a clearer revelation of God and His nature and character than what comes to us in Jesus Christ.

So friends – if people want to know who God is, we direct them to the Christ who was sent at Christmas and fully reveals who God is.

1 Corinthians 1:15 says *“The Son is the image of the invisible God...”* vs 19 continues *“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him”*

And Hebrews 1:3 says *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”*

So at Christmas, while we celebrate the birth of the Son – that celebration is because the Son reveals His Father to us – the Father of Christmas.

So for the next three weeks, we are going to build the anticipation and excitement of celebrating the birth of Christ by studying and reflecting on Matthew 1:1-17.

And our excitement of finally getting to the Christmas story on Dec 24<sup>th</sup> will not be because we're finally finished slogging our way through a tedious list of names...

No, brothers and sisters the story of Jesus' birth will become even more exciting because of what we have learned about God in this introductory material, which Matthew determined - as an eye-witness follower of Jesus Christ and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - was the essential starting point for his Gospel about Jesus Christ.

So we won't skip over it this year.

So we're going to start at the beginning, literally... because Matthew 1:1 literally reads the *"The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham."*

Now our NIV translation reads *"this is the genealogy of Jesus..."* and that is correct on one level, but that English translation misses the reference Matthew is making back to the actual book of Genesis – where everything begins with God creating the heavens and the earth and humanity.

So why would Matthew feel it's necessary to begin his gospel with a reference to the very beginning of our world and this universe?

Because brothers and sisters, he wants us to know that the upcoming announcement of the birth of Jesus is nothing less than announcement of the re-creation of the heavens and the earth.

The gospel of John is a bit more explicit about stating that the good news about Jesus starts at the very beginning - he writes

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."* (John 1:1-3)

You see friends, as the Word of God becomes flesh (John 1:14) it's not just a little baby laying in a manger in a dirty stable... what is laying in that manger is the re-creation of the entire universe.

Those 6 or 7 pounds of crying baby is the solution for everything that is wrong with our world.

So take a moment brothers and sisters to think about and reflect on what has gone wrong in our world... there is violence, racism, genocide, war, famine, sickness, disease...

there are natural disasters, man-made environmental disasters, pollution, animals going extinct... there is unfaithfulness, lying, cheating... there is corrupt gov't, social

problems, people unable to work, people going homeless, families broken apart...

There is unbelief, denial of the truth about God, the idolization of humanity and our abilities, and the denials and dismantling of the created order of male and female made in the image of God.

And friends – Genesis also reveals the rather shocking and outrageous claim that everything which is wrong in our lives and in the world today is the result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience in eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The first couple whom God made and commissioned to rule over the earth and subdue it, to multiply and fill it with other people so that it would be a good and glorious world where the creation is developed and offered back to God in worship and praise... this couple fell – and the entire future of the world fell with them, we fell with them.

Holy Spirit - open our eyes and hearts that we may be convicted to see the truth of this in our lives.

But brothers and sisters – Genesis is also the first place where the good news of the gospel is announced and God reveals Himself as a God of mercy!

God says to the serpent *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* (Gen 3:15)

So in spite of the fact that Adam and Eve and their descendants were now affected by Sin and stood under the curse of death as consequence – God promises that He would show mercy by severing the unholy connection between the woman the serpent, and He would use one of the descendants of the woman to destroy the serpent who had led Adam and Eve into their Sin.

So, it’s important that Matthew leads into the birth of Jesus at the beginning of his gospel with a genealogy that shows us

how Jesus comes from those who are clearly of the line of woman... those who have received God's mercy in His Covenants with them – Abraham, Boaz, David, Hezekiah, Zerubbabel, Joseph... and not from those who are the offspring of the serpent.

This is Matthew's way of showing us that Jesus is the Christ, Messiah, the Anointed one – the offspring who was promised to Eve to crush the head of the serpent.

Now Matthew's reference to Genesis not only proclaims the re-creation of creation to free it from the curse and consequence of Sin, it also proclaims that the baby to be born in the manger will be a re-created Adam – a new humanity free from sin and the curse!

This is what Paul is getting at in 1 Corinthians 15:45 "So it is written: *"The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit."*

Friends, what good is it to re-create the creation if you do not recreate those who are responsible for causing it to be placed under the curse in the first place?

And so, this first section of Jesus' family tree then becomes the testimony to God's ability to work through fallen and sinful men and women to move History along towards the fulfillment of His merciful promises of re-creation – which Matthew proclaims are happening in the birth of Jesus!

So how does Matthew do this?

Well the genealogy is divided into three parts, vs. 1-6, vs. 7-11, and vs. 12-16, and as he explains in vs. 17 *"there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah."*

And in each of these sections Matthew includes some sort of variation from the so-and-so was the father of so-and-so... which tell us something specific about God.

And in the first section, vs 1-6, that we are looking at this morning Matthew adds four women into the mix.

Vs. 3 mentions that Tamar is the mother of Perez and Zerah, vs. 5 mentions that Boaz's mother was Rahab, and Obed's mother was Ruth, and vs. 6 mentions Solomon's mother had been the wife of Uriah.

Now – last month we looked in depth at the story of Ruth and we saw how she had to go and take risqué risk and solicit Boaz to marry her – do you remember that?

And in last week's message we were introduced to the story of Tamar who had to masquerade as a prostitute and seduce her father-in-law Judah in order to have him fulfill his responsibility to provide an heir for her.

And we learned about this connection between Boaz and Rahab – who was that infamous prostitute of Jericho who hid the spies and whose life was spared when Jericho was destroyed by Joshua.

And the fourth scandalous woman in this list is identified as a woman who had an affair and became pregnant while she was still married to her husband Uriah - this would be Bathsheba.

So four women who are not proper and upstanding – with various degrees of scandal attached to them, and... they are also foreigners... and they have come into God's mercy from the outside.

Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba was a Hittite – and their inclusion in this genealogy hints at the coming fulfilment of God's merciful promise made to Abraham that through his offspring ALL nations on earth would be blessed... yet another reference from Genesis.

Chapter 22:18.

But it's not just about the women... look at who they are paired up with. Judah was guilty of neglecting his role to ensure that his daughter in-law was taken care of and provided for.

Boaz needed to be solicited by Ruth in order to get him to take the initiative and marry her and so become her guardian redeemer.

And David... well David was neglecting his responsibility as King to lead his armies into battle and was simply lounging around his palace rooftop when he noticed Bathsheba and summoned her to him.

All negligent men with scandalous women... *(or bad hombres and nasty women)*

Now I don't know about you - but that certainly reminds me of the situation back in Genesis where Eve ate the forbidden fruit while Adam simply stood by and watched her and then ate of it himself.

And that is Mathew's intention – because he wants us to see how God kept his promise of producing the offspring who will crush Satan... from negligent Adam and scandalous Eve,

through Judah and Tamar, Salomon and Rahab, Boaz and Ruth, David and Bathsheba...

All the way up to Joseph, who would have divorced Mary quietly because she was scandalously pregnant with someone else's child.

So do you see what Matthew is doing here with his reference to Genesis, and including these women in the first section of this genealogy?

There's a whole backstory to Jesus' birth that he wants to fill us in on and make us aware of, so that if we are concerned that Christ stays in Christmas we will know why that is so important and how Christ reveals God to us as a God of mercy...

A God who will work through the ages and generations of negligent men and scandalous women, to make sure that the people He created are able to be freed from Satan and from



Sin, when they themselves chose to be enslaved - that is a merciful God.

And sometimes brothers and sisters we need a genealogy like this to pull us up and out of our narrow focus on all our troubles and trials in life and remind us that God IS merciful.

Because when we find out who we are connected to, who we are related to, it pulls us up and open our eyes so that we see that things are bigger than just ourselves – I think that is why these “Discover your DNA” tests and Ancestry.com are so popular these days.

Friends right here in the first chapter of Matthew we discover how we are connected us to God’s work in history as those who are part of the nations who will be blessed by Abraham’s offspring, and how we are connected to Eve – who was named so because she would become the mother of all the living (Gen 3:20) and we have been given life in Jesus Christ who has defeated Satan’s grip on our lives.

Furthermore we can be encouraged by looking at this list of names this morning because the people in this list lived life as you and I do. Each of these people here had a number of incredible promises from God, but they also had problems, pains, struggles and challenges in life... many of the people in this list are also talked about in Hebrews 11.

And if you go and read Hebrews chapter 11 you will discover that saving faith is formed in the tension of between having the joys of the promises of God while struggling with everyday life and adversity.

And Hebrews 11:39-40 says *“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”*

That’s Christmas friends – what these people looked forward to in faith, but did not live to see... and what we look back on in faith and remember by testimony and scripture.

So brothers and sisters, as you enter into the Christmas season and prepare to celebrate Christmas what will you do celebrate the fact that Jesus' birth reveals God as a merciful God to us?

Maybe amid all the hustle and bustle of the season you need to take time to be quiet and listen for the Holy Spirit so He can point out to us the areas in our life where we need God's mercy...

Areas where we are negligent... areas that may be scandalous.

Maybe studying this genealogy – that we normally just skip over - will force you to think about Christmas differently this year...

You'll move away from the superficial sentimental feelings and the lights and decorations and family gatherings; you will go deeper and grasp the real reason why Christ is in Christmas, maybe for the first time...

So that when we gather together on Christmas Eve to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, you will be celebrating God's incredible mercy in your life, and for this world...

And you will be far more willing to extend that mercy to anyone else you know who has been negligent and scandalous so they too may know that Christ in Christmas reveals a God who is the Father of mercy.

Amen.