

Sermon Advent 4 2019

December 22, 2019

Matthew 1:18-25

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. In the Greek, the “genesis” of Jesus Christ took place in this way. And as we hear that, we should rightly connect this back to the first book of Moses, the first book of the Bible. If it’s not clear, Matthew actually makes it all the more clear in the first verse of his book: **The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ.** Again in the Greek there, the book of the “genesis” of Jesus Christ. But in that verse it’s even more complex. This isn’t just speaking of the first book of the Bible, it’s referencing something most common to it. In numerous places if you read that book of Genesis, you see that it will say, “These are the generations of ...” “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created...” Genesis 2. “These are the generations of Noah...” Genesis 6. “These are the generations of the sons of Noah...” Genesis 10. These keep going until lastly in Genesis 37, “These are the generations of Joseph.”

Now what makes this most interesting is that in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible that whose use was widespread at the time of the writing of the New Testament, this word for the “generations,” guess what it was. Yes, “This is the genesis of Joseph,” “the genesis of Noah,” etc. As you see that then, you see something important in the Old Testament. You see this line from generation to generation. Who was important? The son of those who were important. Joseph was important because of his father Jacob; Jacob because of Isaac, Isaac because of Abraham. Then in Numbers you have Moses and Aaron.

Of course in a different way, you follow these lines through the books of the judges, and finally to a man named Boaz. And Boaz fathered Obed, and Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse had a son named David. This line is important; father to son, handed down from generation to generation; one to the next, to the next to the next.

And then you come down the line, Matthew says 27 generations from David to this Jacob who has a son, and this son’s name is Joseph. And who is Joseph? Well, you see something interesting when you look. Joseph apparently is not important. Instead it’s his wife. You see, Joseph is the husband of Mary of whom was born this child Jesus, the Christ.

Of course, we all know this story. We all know that this Christ is miraculous, that He is the Man born of a virgin, the Man with no earthly father because His Father is God. We know, as the angel in Matthew tells Joseph, that this child **which is conceived in [Mary] is from the Holy Spirit**. But as we look at Joseph we see two things about this Heavenly Father, well and about Jesus too, that are striking. Of course, there could be others, but two things in particular struck me this week as I was studying this lesson.

First is the faithfulness of Joseph. **Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly**. See you have to understand betrothal at this time of Jesus. When someone was betrothed, it was basically as though they were married. There was a ceremony, there was a payment, like a dowry. There was a very official and public nature to this. That's not to say that engagements aren't official in many ways in our day, but these were even more so. This wasn't just buying a ring and putting the video of the engagement on social media. No, this was actually contractual, or perhaps covenantal is a better way of saying it. If something got messed up, then there was a real need for consequences.

So in view of this when Mary shows up pregnant, this is adultery, or at least appears to be. When I say that, I don't mean that it's just fornication. That of course is a sin, something the Jews and us as Christians ought to be avoiding. But this is actually the act which would break this covenant, this contract for the marriage. But what's my point in explaining this? Because then you can see Joseph's mercy and grace in his plan to divorce Mary quietly. This baby isn't his, which means she cheated. And according to the Old Testament Law, he had the right to call for Mary to be stoned. And so this just Joseph shows such mercy to Mary. That's the first thing: Joseph's faithfulness.

Second is the dominion of Joseph. What am I talking about here? Listen to those words: **"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."** Do you hear it there? I didn't until this week. You see, I always thought this was plural: "Joseph and Mary, y'all call Him Jesus." But it's not. It's directed just at Joseph here: "Joseph, you call the Baby Jesus." Now, there's a sense in which this isn't a big deal. The angel says the same to Mary in Luke's Gospel: singular, "Mary, you call His Name Jesus." Additionally, it would only be expected that the father, would be in on this naming. You see this naming is in the dominion of father. It's like Adam. Do you remember what Adam did in Genesis 2? He named the

animals. Why? Because God had given him dominion over them. This is important. But this is striking because this isn't Joseph's child. It's Mary's for sure, but not Joseph. Although, I can imagine this would be common for the adoption, but that's just it. This is the Christ, "God with us" who is being adopted. This is the adoption executed right there. And in that the Father is clearly giving dominion over this child to Joseph and Joseph's house. So here is the second thing that struck me: Joseph's dominion.

Now you might ask what the big deal about these things is. Well it comes down to what I just said about this baby: **"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)." This baby is this Immanuel, God with us. This Baby is the One of whom Paul spoke, the One who "who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."** He is the **"King of Glory"** described in the Psalm. In view of that, think about this.

When you consider this, what does this say about our God? Think about the depth of God's work here. Here He's entering into the world—not the Father or the Spirit, but the Person of the Son, but still God—entering into the world and think about what these mean. First of all this submission to Joseph: this is the One through whom the world was created, and here in the house of this Joseph, He's willing to submit Himself to His own creation. Here, the One with all authority, is willingly subjecting Himself to the authority of that which He has made. Think about how amazing this is that our God would do this. So there is something very amazing to consider about the nature of our God and His willingness to subject Himself to these things.

Of course, we think of this in terms of power and that sort of hierarchical structure, and so we start with the consideration of power and subjection to it. And when thinking about the God who created the whole universe, that truly is amazing to consider. But we also see the detail and consideration that God makes when working all things for our salvation. And this is something that is shown all the more when we think about Joseph's faithfulness.

When working these things for our salvation, God chose Joseph because of that faithfulness. Now of course, theologically, we understand that He Himself worked that faithfulness in Joseph, but nonetheless, this is what He does for our salvation. He chooses this man who will show mercy as He shows mercy. He chooses the man that

will care for this child with the care and provision necessary to protect Him for our salvation.

And in all of this you see His care and provision for you. That God would choose this Joseph for the adoption of Jesus, that He would provide your Savior the caring dominion of that house, the faithful home to protect Him. This is to protect your salvation because that is just how much this means for you.

You see in Joseph, we are given a picture of what this God, this Savior does for you. He is faithful to you in giving you all that you need. And as I say that, this is something you see in the provision of your earthly needs. You see it in the fact that He gives He gives you a home as Joseph did Jesus, that He gives you food, shelter, clothing and shoes and all that you need.

But it's seen in the greatest provision of all: the forgiveness of your sins. It's seen in the fact that this Jesus subjected Himself to the authority of Joseph's house so that by that submission, He would be protected to grow into the man who would carry your sins to the cross. It's seen in the fact that He carried those sins to the cross, bleeding and dying for them that you would be forgiven in His resurrection.

Do you see the heart of this God for you? Do you see how He cares for the most miniscule of details to guarantee your forgiveness because that's what He wants: He wants you with Him eternally. And as He does this He even now shows this faithfulness, this provision for you. Even still He worked all things that you would be baptized. He still works it that you hear His Word, He works it that Jesus body and blood would be given to you. That you would be made just like Joseph.

You see that's the point of all this, all of this book of the Bible. I don't mean just the book of Matthew, I mean the whole thing. It isn't just Matthew that is the "genesis" of Jesus, it's the whole thing; whole story orchestrated so that this Jesus would be born to Mary, the wife of this Joseph. It was all worked that His Church would be rescued. It was all worked that you would be rescued and held in His care eternally. Amen.