

# **ADVENT 2022 (MATTHEW)**

*Part 1: “God Breaks into Our Story”*

*Matthew 1:1–17*

Sunday, November 27, 2022

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## **Scripture Reading**

*“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. 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 1:1–17).*

## **Introduction**

Today, we begin Advent season.

Many think of Advent as just a churchy word for the holiday season, but there is so much more to it than that. Advent is about heartache and hope. Advent is about yearning and anticipation. Advent is about intentionally recognizing and mourning over the brokenness of the world and longing for the reality of the Kingdom of God to come into our lives and into our world.

So, in many ways Advent couldn't be more opposite to what we typically associate with the “holiday season.” Advent is actually a healthy counter-culture to a materialist and consumerist rhythms of hurry, haste, distraction and noise.

In fact, our culture's temptations towards distraction tends to only accelerates as we approach Christmas. It is easy for Christmas to be just another day. But it is not. It is a literally a “Holy Day,”

that merits a season of intentional preparation. During the season of Advent, in preparation of Christmas, we will center our hearts and expectations on the reality of our desperate need for God's kingdom to come among us.

For this reason, each week light candles as a way of visualizing our hope for God's kingdom in the midst of darkness. Like ancient Israel, we place our heart in a posture of yearning for the Messiah—God's promised and anointed King—to break into our lives. In fact, the word Advent literally means “breaking in or dramatic arrival.” So, the title of today's sermon is **“God Breaks into Our Story.”**

At the first reading, this passage is about as exciting as reading a Jewish phone book. But the genealogy of Jesus is more than a random list of people. Matthew, the gospel author, is doing something very intentional. He is showing us that we can only understand the story of Jesus if we first understand another very ancient story that God has written through the history of one particular nation in the pages of the Old Testament.

Theologian N.T. Wright explains it this way, **“It is fundamental to the Christian worldview in its truest form that what happened to Jesus of Nazareth was the very climax of the long story of Israel. Trying to understand Jesus without understanding what that story was, how it worked, and what it meant is like trying to understand why someone is hitting a ball with a stick without knowing what baseball...is all about.”**<sup>1</sup>

The genealogy, then, is a type of shorthand review of this unfolding story of Israel.<sup>2</sup> And by reviewing this story we can come to understand the identity of this Messiah, and what he has come to do. Simply stated, *we understand can Jesus' identity only when we understand the story of which he is a part.*

We understand ourselves through stories too. When I was little, I loved to dress up, and one of my favorite costumes was *Spider-man*. I would make a mask using a paper plate, yarn, crayons, and a hole-punch to make a way for my eyes to see through the mask. I then announced that I would be referred to as nothing other than Spider-man. I understood myself and the world around me in terms of the story I had chosen for myself.

And, apparently, the apples have not fallen far from the tree. In fact, each of my sons have followed suit at some point in their lives, including even adopting the identity of Spider-man.

However, while we might outgrow the world of super heroes and fantasy, we all still tend to make sense of our lives and the world around us through the lens of some story. This phenomenon is what some thinkers have termed *“narrative identity.”* *We find our identity in the stories we form for ourselves.* And the story we choose to see ourselves through is dramatically important.

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 71.

<sup>2</sup> A first century Jew would not have been confused to open the gospel of Matthew and find long genealogy. After all, the Old Testament is often filled with genealogies naming the people of God and as a way of remembering the story of God among his people. For example the book of Chronicles of the Old Testament begins with nine straight chapters of genealogies that recount the generations of God's people spanning from Adam to Abraham to David and into the eras of exile and return. While the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles are perhaps some of the easiest books for modern day readers of the Bible to skip over, they were uniquely important to the Jewish people of the first century. Why? They were chronologically the last words of inspired Old Testament Scripture to ever be written. In fact, in the Jewish arrangement of books, the last book of the bible is 1–2 Chronicles (they are one book in the Hebrew canon). Thus, for Matthew to begin with a genealogy is a way for God to pick up the conversation where he last left it. The Matthean genealogy signals to the reader, after centuries of silence, confusion, and oppression under the kingdoms and empires of men, God has not forgotten his people—he speaks again.

One narrative we are often particularly susceptible to believe is what we might call the *American Dream*. We think we will be okay once we get the right degree or the right job. Then, we think we will finally be at peace once we find the right romance or settle down and have an idyllic family. Then, we work ourselves to death because we think money will give us stability and safety. We seek achievement because we believe it will give us significance.

We fervently seek many pseudo-salvations, but we never arrive at a place of rest and peace. And deep in our bones, we recognize the hollowness of this false story and false salvation it brings.

Tragically, we can even repackage the gospel in such a way that Jesus is only a stepping-stone that helps us acquire the things we truly desire. We tell ourselves, “If I worship Jesus, he will give me the spouse I want, the family I want, the money I want, the career I want, and the significance I crave.” But this is not the gospel revealed in the words of Scripture.

We need the gospel to become brilliantly uncommon to us once again. We need to rediscover how surprising the story of the gospel really is. And that is just what Advent is designed to do. d

Advent reminds us that the gospel is where the God’s story breaks into our story. And from this text, I want to show you that he breaks into our story in three different ways: 1.) *God Embraces Our Shame*, 2.) *God Embodies Our Hope*, and 3.) *God Enters Our Story Personally*.

## **Exposition**

### **1. God Embraces Our Shame.**

We’ve just concluded a Thanksgiving holiday, and these end-of-year holidays are usually a time when you get to see a lot of family. This can be a good thing or it can be an awkward thing. Maybe you have a relative that reminds you of Randy Quaid’s “Uncle Eddy” character in the film *Christmas Vacation*. You might even *be* the relative that reminds everyone else of Uncle Eddy!

But do you have any family drama that makes you feel ashamed? Well, you’re in good company, because Jesus has family drama too. The genealogy that Matthew provides for Jesus is intentionally structured to remind us that the story of Jesus’ family tree is a story of shame. It even appears that Matthew has gone out of his way to bring up the juiciest bits of scandalous drama. Parts of Jesus’s family story might seem more at home on a trashy reality show rather than the pages of holy Scripture.

There is *Judah*, who conspired to have his own brother sold into slavery. Then, he had a widowed daughter in-law *Tamar* that he had forsaken; forcing her into a life of prostitution to provide for herself.

There is *Rahab*, who is a prostitute from the city of Jericho. Then, there is Ruth the former worshipper of the false god Chemosh of Moab.

Then, there is *David*, who is mentioned not as a heroic slayer of a giant, but instead the guy who committed adultery with his friend’s wife and then had that same friend murdered.

But the list gets even darker. There is a list of mostly wicked kings who like *Manasseh* abandoned the worship of God for idols, and would even sacrifice his own children to demons. Eventually, God judges the wickedness of this people by allowing them to be conquered and sent into exile.

Yet God reveals himself to be a loving God to broken people, and more than merely tolerating them, he *redeems* them. God does not attempt to gloss over Israel's failures. In Jesus Christ, God embraces the failures of his people.

You didn't get to pick your family. If you think about it, Jesus is the only person who ever did get to pick his family. And he chooses to allow himself to be born into a broken family, that he might know and overcome our shame.

This begs the question: *what are the shameful parts of your story?*

Are you attempting to cover up your shame by punishing yourself? Are you trying to forget about your shame by making yourself busy or finding someone else worse than you to demonize? Are you trying to sedate yourself with entertainment or substance?

How would you tell your story? Would you be as honest as Matthew? Or do you tend to try and project the highly selective, consciously curated image of who you would like to be perceived as ?

The gospel gives us a better way—a more honest way. In the gospel, we are not given good advice that we might become better people—we are given good news that transforms us into new people. Your sin is great, but your Savior is greater.

If you are a Christian, God does not tolerate you. He embraces you in your shame that you might know the glory of redemption.

## **2. God Embodies Our Hope.**

The story of Israel is perhaps primarily a record of God's promise of redemption in which the people of God found great hope. There are three hopes represented here by the three main sections of this genealogy: the hope of Abraham, the hope of David, and the hope of the coming Messiah.

Abraham was the ancient father (or patriarch) of the Jewish people. When the nations of the world rejected God and plunged into idolatry, God initiated a plan of redemption and salvation through the family of Abraham. God made a binding promise or covenant with Abraham. The hope of *Abraham's covenant* was that Abraham's family would be uniquely blessed, and through this this blessing bring blessing to the entire world. This is why the people of Israel are referred to as God's chosen people (Gen 12:2–3).

Then, there was David—the shepherd boy who became king; the singer of Psalms; and the slayer of giants. Like he did with Abraham, God also made a covenant with David. The hope of *David's covenant* was that David's throne would be an everlasting throne; that through Israel the kingdom of God would come (2 Sam 7).

Then, after centuries of sin and compromise, God sent his people into exile from their promise land. But God had not abandoned his people. Even in exile, the prophets of God began to testify to hope. The hope of those who were exiled into the pagan empire of Babylon was that one day God would

restore his people through the coming of an anointed king—a Messiah, as he is called in Hebrew, or the “Christ” as he is called in Greek.

Now it was good that God’s people trusted in this hope. What was bad is that they began to want the gifts rather than the Giver. The people of God wanted the blessings of Abraham, as long as that blessing was wealth and prosperity. They wanted the promised king of David as long as that made them a powerful political empire. They wanted the Messiah, as long as that Messiah gave them the type of salvation that they wanted. *But Jesus gave them a better blessing, a better kingdom, and better salvation than they could have ever expected.*

So too, we often look to God for salvation, but our definition of salvation is often confined to the categories of this world. God’s Spirit cries out from these inspired words that Jesus really is the better hope. He is the only one who will satisfy you in the deepest places of your longing heart. It is in knowing and loving him that you will find the truest joy.

### **3. God Enters Our Story Personally.**

The people of God were not expecting a simple son of a carpenter to be their Messiah. They were not expecting their Messiah—the one who was supposed to liberate them and establish a great political kingdom—to allow himself to be humiliated, tortured, and murdered. They most certainly were not expecting God himself to step off of his heavenly throne and fold himself into an embryo so that he would not only change our story, he would actually enter into it himself.

Now stop for a moment and realize the magnitude of this truth. God is holy and infinite. This means there is nothing in this world that is like him, and there is nothing that contain him. We on the other hand are finite.

We, on the other hand, are limited in every way. And more than that we are sinful. How is it that we can come to actually know God, much less be in relationship with him? Can we come to God through our rationality or emotions? Through our good works? Through our will power and effort or family connections?

No.

If we are to know God and know his salvation, God must come down. *He must enter our story so that he can change our story.*

Pastor Tim Keller captures the beauty of this mystery in his book *The Reason for God*: *“When a Russian cosmonaut returned from space and reported that he had not found God, C.S. Lewis responded that this was like Hamlet going into the attic of his castle looking for Shakespeare. If there is a God, he wouldn’t be another object in the universe to be put in a lab and analyzed with empirical methods. He would relate to us the way a playwright relates to the characters in his play. We (characters) might be able to know quite a lot about the playwright, but only to the degree the author chooses to put information about himself into the play....But Christians believe he did more than give us information. He wrote himself into the play as the main character of history, when Jesus was born in a manger and rose from the dead.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in the Age of Skepticism*. (New York: Dutton, 2008), 126; 128.

## Conclusion

In the old gothic cathedrals of Europe, carefully carved stained-glass windows visualize the portions of Scripture that would have otherwise been inaccessible to illiterate worshipers. And believe it or not, the genealogy of Matthew, was one of the most common portions of Scripture illuminated and displayed on these ancient windows. Such images are often referred to as a “Jesse tree” (show image of the **Jesse Tree**). *Jesse* refers to the father of the David, and a *Jesse tree* refers to the family tree of ancestors that lead from David the king of Israel to Jesus the King of kings.

A Jesse tree is made of shared of broken glass that are pieced together to make something beautiful that tells the story of redemption that culminates in the coming of Jesus. So too, though our lives may be filled with shame and shards of pain, Christ is able and willing to bring beauty forth from our brokenness.

Throughout this book Matthew shows us that, more than entering the story of Israel, Jesus perfected it. Jesus succeeds where Israel fails. Jesus is the true Abraham who leaves a place of comfort to go forth in faith and find a home for his family, so that through him blessing might come into the whole world. He is the true David who fights the true giants of sin, Satan, and death on our behalf, and who will rule and reign with a kingdom that knows no end. Jesus is the one who brings home from our spiritual exile and gives us peace.

Jesus is the true and better Abraham, the true and better David, and the true and better Israel. But even more than that, *the good news for you is that Jesus is the true and better you.*

He has lived the perfect life you should have but could never have lived. As a loving substitute, he has died the death your sin deserved. He has victoriously risen from the dead, and as the true Lord and King he will one day return to heal and restore all that is broken and wrong.

Today, if you do not have a life centered on knowing and serving him, I invite you to know him today. *He will love you in the midst of your shame. He is your fulfillment of your greatest hope. And he has become part of your story so that you might become part of his.*

Redeemer Christian Church, may we focus our hearts on the hope of this salvation. My prayer for us all is that we would be a people changed by the hope of that is ours only in Christ. May we be a people who allow King Jesus to break into our lives in a new and astonishing way!

*AMEN.*

## Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

1. *Read Matthew 1:1–17. Who are the names that you recognize in this list? Briefly recount the stories of the names you recognize.*
2. *Matthew's account of Jesus's genealogy refers to several shady and shameful episodes in the story of Israel. Yet, this is the family that God chooses to enter into. Why is it good news that God embraces the most shameful and embarrassing parts of our stories?*
3. *God's promises to Abraham, David, and the Babylonian exiles represent the hopes of the people of Israel. Where have you placed your greatest hopes, and why is it crucial to see Jesus as the fulfillment of your greatest hope?*
4. *We have now begun the season of Advent. How do you plan to you stir your heart this Advent season to long for the kingdom of God in your life?*