

The Mothers of Jesus

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

This Sunday, we're going to look at the first 17 verses of Matthew's Gospel. So you see right at the top the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

And so we're going to begin this series by just studying this genealogy. And I know this is a text you've been dreaming about unpacking together as a church. I mean, all these names. I mean, what can I say?

I'm here to fulfill your dreams. Here to make your life great. No. But rather than listening to me read all these names and stumble over them, we're going to play this short song that will help you get these names.

So let's go with it. Oh, yeah, dude. I thought about singing it, but... Isaac, he had Jacob.

[1 : 05] Jacob, he had Judah and his king. Then Perez and Zerah came from Judah. His woman Tamar. Perez, he went up.

And his man up and then came. Haram, then Amenadad, then Moshin, who was then the dad of Salmon. With Rahab, Father Boaz.

Ruth, she married Boaz. Who had Obed, who had Jesse. Jesse, he had David, who we know as king. David, he had Solomon.

B'Rai, his wife. Solomon, well, you are the one who he had, he had glory, followed by Elijah, who had Esau.

They said that Joseph had, had Jorah, had Isaiah, had Jophant, then he has been Hezekiah, followed by Manasseh, who had Ammon, who was Ammon, whose father had the one named Josiah, who can't drop her joy to kill, who caused the Babylonians captivity, because he was a liar.

[2 : 23] And he had, she had to know, who begat Seroah, who had Ammon, who had Elias, who had like him, that he's from that, he had to know, he killed the father of Elias, and he had Elias, who had made him, that Jacob, listened very closely, and I want to sing this twice.

Jacob was the father of Josiah, the husband of Mary, the mother of Christ. Isn't that great?

That is, I love that little line, good old Rehoboam. I mean, if you know anything about the text, good old, Rehoboam is not good at all. He's a total slouch. But yeah, so this morning, we're going to study these 44 names.

Not one by one. But to see why God placed these names at the opening of the New Testament.

Why, in the way God has arranged this book, are these names so important.

In a word, where we're going is, Jesus came at Christmas to open wide forever the way to God.

Jesus came at Christmas to open wide forever the way to God.

[3 : 44] I'm going to break this out in three points. First is, Christmas is a wonderfully true story. It's a wonderfully true story. Matthew's gospel, if you know it, if you read it next to all the other gospels, it doesn't begin with stars and shepherds and wise men.

It begins with these names. And if we're honest, these names, I mean, we skim over them real quickly so that we can get down to verse 18 to read about how the birth of Christ came about.

But Matthew slows us down. Matthew begins his story this way for a significant, or many significant reasons.

Matthew begins his story of Christmas saying, what I'm going to tell you, all that I'm going to tell you about this man, about his birth and his life, is true. That's what he's saying with these names.

Matthew doesn't begin his story of Christmas with once upon a time, even though I kind of named our series that sort of tongue-in-cheek. Or he didn't begin it in a galaxy far, far away.

[4 : 52] He begins it with a genealogy. Because back in those days, without the convenience of online records or Ancestry.com, genealogies in the ancient world, tell others exactly who you are.

They were carefully kept so that you could list out your genealogy for employment or for a legal decision, maybe a decision about an estate or about an inheritance.

So you would have them. They're kind of like birth papers. When my in-laws fled Vietnam, they left with their clothes on the back, \$40 cash, and their papers, their birth papers.

And their papers were all they needed. They were vital, though, to confirming who they were and opening up a new life. Because it showed them, as citizens of Vietnam, a country we were opening our borders to.

The point is, genealogies are all about facts. The facts of who your parents are. The facts of where your family's from. The facts of your birth.

[6 : 02] And Matthew begins his story of Christmas placing Jesus and all that he did in real time in history. Jesus is not a metaphor. He's not a myth. He's not a good story.

Jesus is, first of all, a historical person. Now, I wish I could just take so much time right now and do a little bit of apologetics for us. But Jesus was, in the story of Christmas, about a real person born into a real family with a really big family tree, as we just saw, that changed the real world through his life and death.

Christmas is all about brute, cold, hard facts. That's what Christianity has always believed. If Jesus is not real, if he's not a historical person, biblical Christianity crumbles to its pieces.

Now, it's popular to say we believe in the spiritual meaning of Christmas or of Jesus Christ. But as Christians, we must reject that.

If there's no history, there's no spirituality or no truthfulness to it. And Matthew begins his story of Christmas this way, to say Christmas is a true story that's been a long time coming.

[7 : 15] That's what those names are all about. These names, Matthew takes us all the way back to Abraham, back to Mesopotamia who was called out. Matthew takes us on to Egypt where the people lived for 400 years in Egypt under Pharaoh making bricks out of straw.

And then he takes us into the wilderness and into the promised land with Joshua and others. And Matthew takes us on to King David to the kingdom's climax and then down to its decline through Rehoboam and the lot after him.

Matthew takes us into exile and Babylon and back to the land where we wait for the promise to come. Years come and go. I mean, that's what, obviously you see that when you read the genealogy.

Generations come and go. Kings come and go. And all of it's captured in these names. The point of all these names is the story of Christmas doesn't begin in a manger.

The story of Christmas begins at thousands, thousands of years ago and every page of Scripture whispers his name. Jesus, as it says right there at the beginning, verse 1, is the son of David, the son of Abraham.

[8 : 30] I don't think I can improve upon the way Sally Lloyd-Jones opens the Jesus Storybook Bible in capturing this point. She says, the Bible isn't a book of rules or a book of heroes.

The Bible is most of all a story. It's an adventure story about a young hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave prince who leaves his palace, his throne, everything to rescue the one he loves.

It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come in real life. You see, the best thing about this story is it's true.

There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all of the stories are telling one big story, the story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. It takes the whole Bible to tell this story, and at the center of the story there is a baby.

Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He's like the missing piece in a puzzle, the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

[9 : 44] And this is no ordinary baby. This is the child upon whom everything would depend. That's good, isn't it? I don't know about you guys, but I get tired of movies where everyone lives happily ever after.

Because, does anyone live happily ever after? No. But I do find it fascinating for our culture, we just love those stories.

We always want another story of an overlooked princess who finally finds Mr. Wonderful. Wonderful. We always want another story. I mean, they sell like hot cakes another story about a hero who chases down the villain and rights all the wrongs. And it's because we just long for this more than anything else. And all of the wonder of Christmas doesn't prove that it's just another fairy tale. In fact, fairy tales and our love for them just prove we were created for wonder and for another world. I love the way C.S. Lewis says that if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. [11:07] Christ has come and the story of Christmas is wonderfully full of wonder and true. Second, Christmas is for those who hate it most.

Christmas is for those who hate it most. Upon closer look at this genealogy, which you can't see it as much when we hear it as what you'd see it if I just read it through, but several things stand out from this genealogy and one is it doesn't just include men.

One Jewish author several hundred years before the birth of Christ and putting forward his genealogy, he says, let us now praise famous men.

Luke's genealogy, who's very kind to women throughout his gospel, lists 67 men, but Matthew's gospel includes 40 men and 5 women in his genealogy.

And if you read the original text, it's very repetitious. There's a lot of repeating that begat. That's why that song is called Matthew's Begat. It just means he gave birth to and that's what the KJV has, which gets it right in that and it's just Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, Jacob begat Judah, and so on and so on and so these women stand out because they break up the pattern.

[12:37] You know, genealogies are, as I said, a lot like birth papers, but they're also a lot like resumes. In the old world, they included your family, your clan, your lineage, not merely as a way of telling who you are, but as a way of impressing other people and opening up doors of opportunity for you.

So people would edit out their genealogies, much like we edit out our resumes. You know, we skip over that job, we quit suddenly and left everyone hanging.

You know, we don't want them to talk to that manager, right? Or we leave out the couple semesters at community college where we didn't try. Yeah, that's not the graduate education we want in our resume, but Matthew does no editing.

In fact, Matthew pulls in shocking things to say things about the shocking grace of Christmas.

So let's look at these women briefly. They are Tamar, which you see down there in verse 3. Had the two boys, Perez and Zerah.

[13:50] They are Rahab, comes down in verse 5. They are Ruth, which we know Ruth, in verse 5 also, and they are the Sheba, or the wife of Uriah, and finally they are or she is.

Mary. So these ladies are included for specific reasons. So Tamar was married to the oldest of three brothers. When her husband died, one of the brothers was supposed to take her in marriage. That's the way the Old Testament law worked, and they were there to take her in marriage and continue their brother's line. None of them did, so she takes matters into her own hands.

She tricks and seduces her father-in-law so that she could have a baby. Both of them should have been stoned, but instead she gives birth to a son who would become the father of Jesus Christ. Rahab is a prostitute. This one's an incestuous relationship. Commits sin sexually and incest. Rahab is a prostitute in Jericho.

[15:02] She was not an Israelite. She doesn't belong on this list. Right? This list is filled with Israelites by birth, but you know her story.

She heroically risks her life and hides Israelite spies in her home. Before long, she finds herself married to Salmon and also a mother of Jesus.

Ruth is the best in my favor in so many ways, but she is a Moabite woman. She lives in a foreign land. It was a land they weren't even supposed to go to, let alone a people they were called to marry.

Once her husband, she marries an Israelite man and then he dies and left with the opportunity to go away. She stays by her mother-in-law's side.

She says, your God will be my God. Your people will be my people. Sometimes we read that at weddings, which is kind of awkward, because that's a promise between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law.

[16:02] But she refuses to leave, and it's a wonderful statement. She refuses to leave. She's willing to do whatever she must do to provide for her mother-in-law and for her.

Boaz is next in kin. Now this tempts me to go preach the whole book of Ruth, but we can't do it. He marries Ruth. He does what Tamar's husband's brothers should have done.

He marries her. The Moabite. Ruth gives birth to Obed. Obed to Jesse. Jesse to David, the king, and then you're just thinking finally something that belongs in this genealogy, a king.

But several words later we meet Bathsheba. Here only referred to as the wife of Uriah. Now this recalls one of the saddest scenes in the history of the Old Testament.

We all know the story, but Matthew's writers knew the story. Why does Matthew not include her name? All the others are listed, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Mary, but here it's the wife of Uriah.

[17:16] And you know the story while King David was on the run from Absalom when his son came and took over the city of Jerusalem and pushed him out. A group of men went out into the wilderness to protect him.

A group of bad men, or bad in a good way I guess, went out there to protect him and be with him. They were his mighty men he said and Uriah was one of them. Uriah was one of his mighty men, one of these men that sacrificed everything to protect the king.

David repays him years later. While he's out fighting again for his country, David sleeps with his wife. Adding insult to injury, when David finds out she's pregnant, he arranges for Uriah to be killed. Both he and Bathsheba should have been stoned immediately. Instead, he reigns and gives birth to a baby, to Solomon.

David removes her name not condemn her but to slam the king. Matthew removes her name not to condemn Bathsheba but to slam the king.

[18:29] He removes her name so that we're not distracted by Bathsheba but that our eyes are all focused on this king and the attention and the guilt that rightly belongs to him when he abused and used this otherwise loyal woman.

So what's Matthew trying to say in this ridiculous genealogy? Why put so much emphasis on how colorful and crooked the family line of Jesus Christ is?

I think the point is Christmas is not for the in crowd. The good crowd or the successful crowd.

Christmas is for the prostitutes, the adulterers, the misfits, the rejects, the failures.

Christmas is for the outcasts. It's for people who've realized they're broken and they realize the only thing that will help them is grace. Christmas is not for those who have it together.

Christmas is for those who are on the verge of giving up. It's for those who've run out of options. It's for those who hate it the most. Christmas, and this is so hard to remember, Christmas is for Scrooge who didn't realize he needed it and grew to love it the most, didn't he?

[19:53] Or Linus, you know, I love the story of Linus who's just a complainer. I can relate to Linus, you know, some of these great heroes and I can't relate to, I can relate to Linus, a complainer for no reason.

He's annoyed by all the carols and the commercialization of Christmas. He doesn't get it, right, until someone tells him, is it Charlie Brown? Oh, it's Charlie Brown.

Dang it. Corrected from the front row by my son, eldest son, thank you, son. But he doesn't get it.

It's Charlie Brown who I can relate to. I made so much of that. that's funny. He doesn't get it until somebody tells him the real meaning right.

You know, I feel like we should offer a class every Christmas. How to remain Christian through Christmas. You know, I am not preoccupied with trying to put Christ back in Christmas.

[20:55] I'm preoccupied with trying to put the Christian back in Christmas. that we not get duped by Christmas in our culture. You know, one of the ways we take Christmas or take the Christian out of Christmas is by acting like Christmas is only for happy people.

We can sometimes think, oh, Christmas is just for those who have the fire lit and the stockings strong and the music going in the background and reading twice the night before Christmas or better yet Luke 2 around the families.

It's for the successful. And the beautiful, the ones who laugh easily and never cry. But that's all backwards is what Matthew would say.

You have it all backwards. Listen to this quote from Matt Redmond. He said, Jesus came for those who look in the mirror and see ugliness. Jesus came for daughters whose fathers never told them they were beautiful.

Jesus came for those who go to wing night alone. Christmas is for those whose lives have been wrecked by cancer. The thought of another Christmas seems like an impossible dream.

[22 : 08] Christmas is for those who would be nothing but lonely if not for social media. Christmas is for those whose marriages have careened against the retaining wall and are threatening to flip over the edge.

Christmas is for the son whose father keeps giving him hunting gear when he wants art materials.

Christmas is for smokers who cannot quit even in the face of a death sentence.

Christmas is for prostitutes, adulterers, and porn stars who long for love in every wrong place.

Christmas is for college students who are sitting in the midst of the family and already cannot wait to get out for another drink.

Christmas is for those who traffic in failed dreams. Christmas is for those who have squandered the family name and fortune. They want home, but can I imagine a gracious reception?

Christmas is for parents watching their children's marriage fall into disarray. Christmas is really about the gospel of grace for sinners. Because of all that Christ has done on the cross, the manger becomes the most hopeful place in the universe darkened with hopelessness.

[23 : 14] In the irony of ironies, Christmas is for those who find it the hardest to enjoy. It's for those who hate it the most. Christmas is for you.

I don't know if you're happy or sad when you look at the next three weeks. I don't know if this year has been a year of bliss or a year of misery.

I don't know if you love this time of year, you're playing carols right around Labor Day, or if you dread it. Wonderfully, one of the many reasons the Bible includes genealogy is because the Lord wants us to know he doesn't forget anyone's name.

And he hasn't forgotten yours. He made you. He knows you. And he came for you with all your baggage.

He might enjoy Christmas. Whether the stockings are strong or the tree is up, or whether you don't want to do those things at all.

[24 : 29] But don't miss the story behind it all. Third, Christmas is the beginning of the end of all sin and pain. Christmas is the beginning of the end of all sin and pain.

Another thing that stands out from this genealogy, which you did or would have noticed in the song, is the emphasis upon David. Right there at the beginning, verse 1, if you look at me, he says the book of genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David.

Verse 6, it says Jesse, the father of David the king, and then right after that, and David. So it just has David right in the center of this genealogy, and then down in verse 17, it tells us how it's arranged.

All the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations, from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations.

And, you know, obviously David was a key figure in the history of Israel. He was the king after God's own heart, but something else is going on here. You know, genealogies, we kind of become an expert in the last few minutes, but genealogies were carefully arranged.

[25 : 42] In many ways, they're arranged to be memorable, but also memorizable, so that you could memorize them and recite them, and so they were often carefully arranged for a specific purpose.

So this genealogy, in fact, does not include every generation. Now you think, that should be right, you know? But it's because it's arranged for a specific purpose.

It's arranged along three sets of 14. Matthew tells us that in verse 17. David's name is the 14th name on the list.

Even more, Jewish people assign number values to consonants. I know we're getting deep here, but they assign numeric value, number value to consonants, so that lists like this could say even more.

David's name has three consonants. The D represents six. The V represents four. The D represents six.

[26 : 50] David, with the vowels out, that's six plus four plus six equals 14. So Matthew's trying to tell us something very specific, that all of this genealogy wraps around 14.

Did I mess that up? Oh, it must be vice versa. Sorry about that. It must be six plus four. Or four plus six plus four. Man, I'm getting corrected from the crowd today.

But the point is, I was a religious studies major, not a math major, all right? Back off me. The point is, and what David's trying to say is that all of this genealogy, or what Matthew's trying to say, that all of this genealogy is trying to tell us that Jesus is the true son of David.

While it definitely says that the Christmas story is true, while it definitely says the Christmas story has room for all the outcasts, it says in a most powerful way that Jesus is the true son of David.

And here we have to slow down a bit to appreciate what's going on. At the height of his power in about 1000 B.C., David, the king, he says to the Lord, I want to build you a house.

[28 : 02] And we know the story, right? He says, I want to build you a house. I want to build you a place to dwell on the earth. But God says, we're going to have it the other way around. While David wants to build a dwelling place for the Lord, as we talked about last week, God says, I want to build a dynasty to you, much like the Alabama dynasty that just crumbled before our very eyes.

And all God's people said, amen, you know? And this is the way it is in 2 Samuel 7. Your son, this is a promise the Lord says to him, your son shall build a house, a dwelling place for my name, and I'll establish the throne, literally the house, so the dynasty, the throne of his kingdom forever.

So your son shall build me a house, but I'll one-up that. You know, I'll establish his throne, the throne of his kingdom forever. I'll be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

And so promises, though, they continued from 1,000 B.C. to talking about who this one would be. In the 1700s, Isaiah prophesied, which we recited earlier, and we have for you here.

For us, for to us a child is born. To us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulders. For his name shall be wonderful, counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

[29 : 27] Of the increase of his kingdom and peace, there'll be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness. From this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

And so the idea is that as these prophets are prophesying, they're seeing that this promise is something greater than an earthly king because he's to be mighty God.

His increase, there'll be no end. He'll reign forever and ever and establish everything with justice and righteousness.

So this is a son of David, but it's greater. It will come through a child, a son, but it will be greater. In the 500s B.C., Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord himself would come.

Now you should go read Ezekiel 34 this afternoon. It's incredible. With 25 times with powerful effect, the Lord says, I will come for my people. And this is the way it ends. I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

[30 : 33] When they're exiled in Babylon, I'll seek them out. I'll rescue them from all the places where they've been scattered. I'll feed them. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep. I'll set up over them one shepherd, my servant David.

You see that's pointing back to that promise. And he shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God. And my servant David shall be prince among them.

I, the Lord, have spoken. And so what Matthew's saying hundreds of years later is that this is him who's born in a manger in Bethlehem.

He is the son of David. He's the rightful heir. That's why the genealogy's there. He's the, he's the rightful heir. He's the one who has the right father and the right mother to sit on the throne forever. He's rightly called the Christ. That's what he's saying. He's the anointed one. He's the Messiah. He's the king. He's the fulfillment of everything that's been pointing forward to in the Bible.

[31 : 33] But David, or Matthew's also saying wonder of wonders. He is the Lord. He's the son of God. The one that we've longed for. The wonderful counselor.

The mighty God. The everlasting father. The prince of peace. He is the good shepherd who will shepherd his sheep and lay down his life for him.

What Matthew is saying, he's the true and better Abraham. He's the father of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. He's the true and better David who will reign forever and never harm his people. And that's all this genealogy is trying to say. And I love the way it does it. It's organized around David. It calls him the king, but it also points out how he failed. Because that David is not the David that the Bible points forward to.

Because the David who will open wide forever the weight of God is Jesus Christ. Christ. But the baby in Bethlehem is not the immediate end of all the pain and sin as we know it, is it?

[32 : 59] But it does announce that it's coming soon. Bethlehem is an expiration date.

Your sin's going out of date. Your pain is going out of date. Much like that milk goes out of date. All the pain and trouble is going out of date.

I mean, I just long for a day where I'll never have to confess harshness again. I'll never hear of another hospital stay or another confirmed report of cancer or another rape or another man ditching his wife.

Another person stuck in sorrow. Another loss. Christmas doesn't end these things for me and you, but it does promise that that day is coming soon.

In March of 1863, 18-year-old Charles Appleton Longfellow walked out of his family's home in Massachusetts to board a train for Washington, D.C.

[34 : 05] to fight with Lincoln's army in the Civil War. Charles was the oldest of six children.

His father, Henry Longfellow, was a famous poet in those days and he was also a recent widower. The story goes that two years before that, his wife had tragically died after her dress caught on fire in the family's home.

He tried so hard to rescue her, dousing her with whatever he could, wrapping her with his own body. He had burned scars all over his body, all over his face, so much so that he wore a beard from that day for the rest of his life to hide him.

On December 1st, 1863, eight months after he enlisted his son Henry, his eldest son, Henry received word that his eldest son was severely wounded and would be discharged.

Henry traveled as fast as he could to D.C. to see the boy. He found his son barely alive.

[35 : 16] nearly paralyzed. And on Christmas Day, the widowed father of six, the oldest of whom had nearly died and of war his country fought against itself, wrote these words that you probably know.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

And thought, as the day had come, the bell towers of all Christendom had rolled along the unbroken song of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

Till ringing, singing, on its way, the world revolved from day to night, a voice, a chime, a chant, sublime, that just means happy, of peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

Then, from each black of cursed mouth, the cannon thundered in the south. This is in the midst of the Civil War. With the sound and the carols were drowned of peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

[36 : 32] In despair, I bowed my head. There is no peace on earth, I said, for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

Then, pealed the bells more loud and deep. God is not dead, nor does he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

And he gets it right. God's not dead, nor is he sleeping. The story of Christmas announces that he came to open wide the way to God and will soon come to take us all the way home.

We celebrate Christmas not because it's the end, because it's the beginning of the end. And he who called us is faithful.

And he who came first will come again. Let us pray. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

[37 : 48] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.