

SLIDE 1

A Reason to Follow

From the Birth of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew
By David Dahms adapted from a message by Matt Woodley
Matthew 1:1-23
December 6, 2009

Introduction

On June 5, 1978, a seven-year old boy named Martin Turgeon slipped off a wharf and fell into the Prairie River in Canada. At least a dozen adults saw him struggle for a few moments before he sank and drowned. Why didn't anyone dive in to save him? Just upstream, a plant used to dump raw sewage right into the river. The water was dirty—dangerous to your health. So, nobody jumped in to save Martin Turgeon.

It's easy at times to view God as one of the onlookers standing on the wharf of the Prairie River. We feel like God looks at us and says, "Look, I'm not diving into the mess of your life until you get out of the putrid river. I am a holy God, so you clean up your act first, and then I'll accept you and embrace you and love you." But in our passage for this morning, we meet a God who was—and *is*—willing to plunge into the mess of human sin and sorrow. We meet a God who says, "I'm coming after you before you get out of the river and clean yourself up."

In this well-known Christmas story, we'll explore two incredible facets to the Good News that Jesus came to bring us.

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First, we learn that in the birth of Jesus, God stands with us in our sin and shame and sorrow.

Second, in the action of Joseph, we see a radically new standard for how we should live.

First of all, we learn that in Jesus, God stands with us in our sin and shame and sorrow. He takes the plunge, so to speak, and as a result, he sets a radically new standard for how we should live.

Second, because God stands with us in our sin, we are called to stand with and for others in their sin and sorrow. This radically redefines the nature of community and the essence of what it means to be a "good person."

God stands with us in our sin and shame and sorrow.

You'll notice the "plunge" God takes in [Matthew 1:1-17](#).

SLIDE 3

Matthew 1:1-17 (NIV)

The Genealogy of Jesus

1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

These verses seem pretty dismal and boring. It's just a list of names! But these verses are actually filled with good theology and great storytelling. These names establish that Jesus is a descendent of King David, the greatest king of the Jewish people. This connection is important because the Messiah promised in the Old Testament was often called a Son of David.

The prophecy came through Isaiah.

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Isaiah 11:1-5 (NIV)

The Branch from Jesse

11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;

From his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—

³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,

or decide by what he hears with his ears;

⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;

with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

SLIDE 5

Isaiah 11:10 (NIV)

¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

So what do we see in birth of Jesus the above verse the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Ancestral line of the Messiah? Matthew records the genealogy of the messiah.

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Matthew 1:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

And so we see the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled

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<p>Prophecy Spoken Isaiah 11:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ In that day the <u>Root of Jesse</u> will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.</p>	<p>Prophecy Fulfilled Matthew 1:5-6 (NIV) ⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.</p>
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This genealogy also establishes what kind of Messiah this Son of David will be. These verses tell us that he is willing to take the plunge into our mess. He won't sit on the pier and watch us struggle. He will jump in and save us. Consider, for example, that four of the people in Jesus' family tree were foreign women who had questionable backgrounds. Women did not usually appear in family trees during this time—especially *immoral* women. This is Matthew's way of telling us that this Messiah is willing to plunge into the mess of the whole world.

Notice also the names of the Messiah: "Jesus" and "Emmanuel." [Verse 21](#)

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Matthew 1:21-23 (NIV)

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

This tells us that this will be a very different kind of Savior from the one Israel expected. He will "save his people from their sins." First of all, isn't it amazing for God to call us his people? What a compliment! God wants *us*. But notice also the disturbing side of this verse: God will save his people from *their sin*. Matthew's readers would have been shocked by this idea. They thought the Messiah-King would save them from the **sin of others, not their sin**. Remember what they shouted on Palm Sunday, at the triumphal entry, "Hosanna, which means, save us we pray!" But his names means not their sin but the name of Jesus doesn't just mean, "God save us from them." It also means, ". God save us from ourselves."

What a challenging but hopeful word! Jesus' first job is to save us from our sin—our pride, our stubbornness of heart, our lust, our oppression of others, our lack of love, our hardness of heart. Sin is a serious issue, and God takes the initiative to deal with it "once for all" in Christ. God plunged into the mess of our lives **before** we could, on our own strength, and by our own efforts, get out of the river and clean up our act.

But notice in [verse 23](#) the other key name for Jesus: "Emmanuel." Literally translated, it means "with us, the God" or "the with-us God." It's a powerful name. We shouldn't weaken it by saying that "in Jesus, God draws near to us." No! It means that Jesus *is* God with us.

SLIDE 9**The Ancestry of the Messiah**

The genealogy of Jesus shows He came to save us from OUR sins while we were still IN our sins.

But what do we do with the Good News that God stands with us in our sin and shame and sorrow?

First of all, we accept what he has done for us. We quit trying to get our act together before we come to God. We realize that God has plunged into the putrid mess of our lives, saving us. And we let him save us.

But there is a response called for in us.

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Because he has come in for us before we have our act together, we are called to stand with others before they have their act together.

We are called to stand with and for others in their sin and shame and sorrow.

But the work of God in Christ also sets into motion a new standard for loving others. We see this demonstrated so powerfully in the story of Joseph. In the Christmas story, he lives by the pattern of the cross of Jesus before the cross of Jesus took place.

SLIDE 11

Matthew 1:18-19 (NIV)

The Birth of Jesus Christ

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

In [verse 19](#), Joseph is singled out as a "righteous man." He follows the rules—not just the silly, optional rules that people create to make life complicated, but rules laid out by God. For instance, Jewish law said that a man and woman were not supposed to engage in a sexual relationship until they were married. A righteous man like Joseph, then, would have honored that law in his relationship with Mary. But he suddenly learns that his fiancée is "with child"—and he doesn't know that this has come about through the Holy Spirit. All he knows is that he's in a horrible dilemma. If he marries his fiancée, others would assume that he got her pregnant. Since he hadn't anticipated a virgin birth—and since Mary had not claimed to be raped—he could only come to one conclusion: Mary had been with another man.

It's difficult for us to imagine the depth of Joseph's shame at this point. In his culture a fiancée's unfaithfulness would imply Joseph's inadequacy, bringing shame on him and his entire family. In fact, Jewish, Greek, and Roman law all demanded that a man divorce his wife or break off the engagement if she was unfaithful. People surrounding Joseph would have possibly mocked him and treated him with contempt, so Joseph would have benefited from "going public" with a divorce—literally and not just figuratively. He could have impounded her dowry—the total assets she brought into the marriage—and perhaps recouped the price he paid to have her as his bride. But Joseph was a good man—a righteous man. He chose a more compassionate path: [verse 19](#) says that "he had in mind to quietly divorce her." In other words, in front of two or three witnesses, he would quietly issue her a certificate of divorce and minimize her public dishonor. Although deeply wounded, Joseph chose the righteous path, a path that would allow him to maintain his honor without humiliating Mary.

This was the path he chose for the time being—a path that clearly qualified him as a good person. But then

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God called Joseph to a new standard—a standard beyond merely following rules. God called Joseph to live according to God's standard of love.

When you think about the steps Joseph had to take concerning Mary, God called Joseph to plunge into sin and shame. Notice [verse 24](#):

SLIDE 13**Matthew 1:24-25 (NIV)**

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

"He took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son." This situation was messy and offensive. It would call his righteousness into question. In his commentary on Matthew, Frederick Dale Bruner writes:

Why would the Gospel story begin on such a scandalous note? ... Joseph, Matthew says pointedly, was a "righteous man." And Joseph found what was happening offensive. But Joseph was overcome by a divine intervention, and he made a new decision—the decision to marry Mary. Joseph now dared to ... go this initially embarrassing and lonely route of marrying a pregnant fiancée. (so we see) from the instant that Jesus appeared on the world scene, even at his conception, he caused righteous people to rethink what was righteous.

Joseph could have walked away and still been a righteous person. But

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God called him to a new standard of love, to a whole new way of being a good person. A good person is no longer just someone who avoids sin and follows the rules. Under the cross of Jesus, a truly good person also identifies with sinners.

Conclusion

What does all of this mean for us? Perhaps your life or your family is a mess. Perhaps you feel like God can't touch you this morning. You know that you're not one of the "decent" people here today. You have skeletons in your closet—secret sins or scary addictions to deal with. You have a bitter or vengeful spirit that threatens to boil over during this season. On the outside to look like you have your act together, but on the inside you have greed and self-indulgence and hypocrisy. You have *sin*. But this should not—and must not—drive you to despair or shame or discouragement. Jesus' name means "our God saves." He will save us from our sins. That's why he came. He's the "with-us God" in the midst of this mess. You can't get out of the mess alone, the only thing you can do is stop fighting and let Jesus, who has dived in your mess, rescue you.

Or...

Perhaps you're thinking, *I'm pretty decent. My family is in pretty good shape. I have my sin battles, but I'm a fairly good person.* You may be right. Let's just assume that, like Joseph, you are a righteous man or a righteous woman. But do you have the *new* kind of righteousness? Do you possess the kind of Christ-like righteousness that plunges into the

raw sewage of humanity? Let me ask some questions that to help you evaluate where you are:

When you see or hear about people sinning, does your heart break with tears and compassion or do you just want to gossip? Do you move towards the sinner, or do you want to move away? Do you ignore the sin or do you move into it and say, "We need to talk. I love you but there's something in your life that needs to be dealt with, and I'm not leaving you until it is." Do you not associate with certain people because of their sinful behavior? Are you willing to bear the shame of others' sin because of your contact with them? Do people know that if they had a problem that was causing their life to fall apart, that they could come to you and find solace? In other words, Do you really understand the new righteousness under the cross of Jesus?

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On the first Christmas, God came into our mess to rescue us, and Joseph had to come into Mary's "scandal" and rescue her.

On the first Christmas, Joseph had to follow the way of the cross.

He had to crucify his desire for revenge. He had to crucify his reputation. He had to crucify his safe and predictable Christian walk with the perfect Christian family. He had to crucify his idea of being a good person. He had to crucify his antiseptic, safe, clean ideas of being separated from sinful people. He had to crucify his ideas of decent love to be a crucified Christian. Are we willing to do the same? Are you ready to follow?