

Advent #2
Jesus' Ancestry.com

NEWS FLASH: The Christmas season can be rather hectic.

What does Christmas mean to you? When you think of Christmas, what first comes to mind?

- manger scene
- kids' Christmas play
- presents
- carols and songs
- visiting family
- special food
- seasonal movies
- Christmas tree
- Santa

What makes it "The most wonderful time of the year"?"

If we're honest, we can admit that Christmas has, for the most part, become a cultural, not a religious holiday. It has been that way for a while. In 1965, Lucy, in the Charlie Brown Christmas special, told us that "Christmas is a big commercial racket. It is run by a big eastern syndicate."

If we removed Jesus from the season, most folks would keep on with the traditions because we like festive holidays and getting presents.

It can be a challenge to understand and communicate the real meaning of the birth of Christ when its true meaning is buried under so many layers of tradition. (First Days of Jesus. – Kostenberger/ Stewart)

Justin Taylor (forward to the First Days of Jesus) offers some helpful insights into how we might profit from the Advent Season.

One reason for observing Advent is so that we can SLOW DOWN as we seek to reflect on the significance of the Incarnation.

The "season" of advent enables us to slow down and spend more time reflecting on the "mystery of history".

Another reason is so that we can GO DEEPER into this great mystery.

Linger longer so you get more out of it.

A third use of Advent is to make connections between the Incarnation and the rest of the biblical narrative.

While the birth of Jesus is THE HINGE of redemptive history and the basis for our calendars, only 4 ½ of 1,189 chapters of the Bible are devoted to the events surrounding the birth of Christ.

Much of the gospel narratives deal with the last week in the life of Christ. But if the man who died on the cross wasn't God in the flesh, then his death was of no more significance than that of any other victim of "Roman justice."

To get a fuller sense of the significance of the birth of Jesus we need to dig into some familiar passages. That can be hard because some of them become like the wallpaper- boring after a while.

The two gospel writers that record the events, Matthew and Luke, were not around when Jesus was born.

Their narratives show a concern for detail and accuracy. They may not include every detail, but they give a big picture overview that puts Jesus in the middle of redemptive history.

They couldn't interview the angels or the Wise men, but they did have access to Mary and the half-brothers of Jesus, James and Jude. They probably has second hand accounts from Joseph as he passed on his encounters with angels, the flight from Bethlehem to Egypt and the return after the death of Herod.

Last week I mentioned that Advent helps us reset our spiritual calendars. By that I mean that we begin the "new year" on Christmas Day, not on Jan 1st. I know that some of you have a habit of reading the Bible in a year. Some have tried that for the first time recently. Some have tried and given up. Some have said, "Ain't happening, so why pretend to even start."

I want to encourage ALL OF US to go deeper in our reading and meditation of biblical truth this year. It may be deeper in terms of scope – reading more than before. Reading portions we've neglected in the past. It may mean deeper in terms of consideration, even if it means reading less.

With that in mind, I've prepared a 3 Year Bible Reading Calendar and have put copies in the lobby.

One way to get more out of the Christmas narrative and the whole bible is to learn to read it VERTICALLY and HORIZONTALLY. (Kostenberger).

Vertically means reading each gospel or epistle (or section, such as birth narrative) from beginning to end as a self-contained story in its own right.

Reading Horizontally means exploring how each section or book relates to the whole bible. Are there other passages or books that deal with this theme, etc.

As you read, look for common themes from the OT to NT. Consider the historical context of the stories. And read devotionally as you seek to be drawn closer to God.

The bible was not just written to convey information; it was written for our transformation. As we read, we should ask God to use His Word in our lives.

God can only use the Word in our lives that we have READ, so it is important that we take up and read. Imagine that you are on a spiritual journey and are beginning to look into this man, Jesus. You've heard about him and you know that he has something to do with Christmas, right? The season is named for him. Even our calendars revolve around his birth so you figure that he must be important.

In his book, The First Days of Jesus, Andreas Kostenberger presents an imaginary reader who would encounter the gospel narrative in the book of Matthew. It's the first book of the NT, so if you want to look into the person of Jesus, why not start at the beginning of his story – Matthew 1.

What do you encounter? A genealogy; a list of begats. WWWHHHYYYY?

1The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. 3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. 4 Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon.

5 Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. 6Jesse was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. 7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. 8 Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah.

9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. 10 Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. 11 Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

12 After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. 13 Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. 14 Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. 15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. 16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

We all learn in English class that when we write something we want to begin with a catchy opening paragraph or memorable phrase:

“IT was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” – Tale of two cities

“I wear the ring.” The Lords of Discipline

“This is my favorite book in all the world, though I have never read it.” – Princess Bride

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” – Anna Karenina

“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.” 1984

...”All children except one, grow up.” Peter Pan

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” Pride and Prejudice

“Call me Ishmael” – Moby Dick

Matthew’s idea of a catchy opening was a genealogy. Was his intended audience a gathering of Ancestry.com subscribers? NO

His original audience was Jewish, and genealogies were VERY IMPORTANT TO THEM.

While this genealogy may not twang our buds, it was catchy for the Jewish people. If you’ve read much of the OT you noticed that it is also full of genealogies.

A.Kostenberger (ibid) **Ancestry was culturally, religiously, and politically important in the era we call Second Temple Judaism—that is, the period between the reconstruction of the temple in 516 BC and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70.**

A pious Jew at the time of Christ would know that the OT story line began in a garden where all was good until our first parents rejected God’s rule and everything went radically wrong after that. Our imaginary Jewish reader would want to know how the current story of Jesus was connected to the original story of the Torah. The genealogy connects Jesus to Abraham. That is important because after the rebellion in the garden, God chose Abraham to be the head of a new line of people who might follow God and bless the nations.

This would take place through the one who was THE promised seed in Gen 3. After the sin of Adam, the serpent (Satan) was cursed by God, and in that curse God gave a promise:

Speaking to the serpent, God declares the following: **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”**

While it is a bit strange and puzzling, this prophecy in essence declares that one day a human descendant of the woman will crush the head of the Serpent. In Gen 12 God comes to Abraham and promises that he will be a great nation and a blessing to all the world. Scripture is clear that Abraham is not the promised one. Though he is a man of great faith, he is also a man of sins and failures. That meant that the promised one of Gen 3 was still to come from the line of Abraham. Therefore, the genealogy of Matt 1 starts with Abraham and ends with Jesus, the Messiah.

Imagine someone reading through the Bible for the first time without knowing its ending, and he/she comes across Matthew 1. The reader would see that Jesus is connected to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David. That is an impressive family tree.

The OT ends without the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, so 400 years later, the people at the time of Christ are still waiting and longing. Jesus arrives on the scene doing things that look Messianic and teaching with authority, but many still doubt. In a relatively short time, the gospels are written to confirm the experience of those who knew Jesus.

Here at the front end of the NT we have this genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham. He becomes the hinge of human history. The written genealogy of Matthew 1 goes back to Abraham, whom we know from the OT narratives is the descendent of Adam and Eve. (rf Luke 3).

Jesus is the promised “seed” who will crush Satan and undo the work of the fall and begin to set things right.

Four features of Matthew’s listing of Jesus’s family tree deserve comment. To begin with, **the first two Greek words of the New Testament, biblos geneeseōs (“The Book of the Genealogy”), mirror the language used in Gen 2:4 to introduce the account creation itself and the genealogy connected to Adam. This links Jesus’ genealogy to God’s original plan for his creation.**

Next, we see the mention of four women in the list: Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and Bathsheba. Their complicated stories show how God’s plan is to bring in non-Jewish people and those who might also be marginalized. These non-Israelite women foreshadow the spread of the gospel and the power of God to forgive and restore sinners and those wounded by the sin of others.

Third, while Mary was a nice Jewish girl, her story of conception was unusual and questionable. The first-time reader might notice how “father/son” pattern was broken with Joseph. (A. K. ibid)

Ex: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers...15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. 16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

The original language makes it clearer that Jesus is the legal son of Joseph, but NOT THE BIOLOGICAL son of Joseph. The reader must wait for the rest of the chapter to get ‘the rest of the story’.

Finally, the genealogy of salvation is divided into three periods of fourteen generations each: Abraham to David; David to the exile; the exile to Jesus.

Matthew is showing that God IS IN CONTROL even in the most difficult periods of Israel’s existence – the Babylonian exile. Now after 400 years of silence since the last prophet Malachi, God is at work again.

This genealogy shows that God has revealed the identity of THE SEED, the ultimate hero.

The long-expected Jesus, The Messiah has come.

Our Savior has come.

Our Deliverer has come.

Our Advocate has come.

Our Wonderful Counselor has come.

As we close, consider the words of the Frank Houghton hymn...

This beautiful hymn was written to honor and esteem missionaries John and Betty Stam. In China, 1934, they were taken prisoner by Communist soldiers, along with their three-month-old baby, Helen. John and Betty were marched to their deaths, but miraculously, baby Helen, hidden in a sleeping bag, survived and was discovered five days later. She was still alive.

The deaths of John and Betty Stam electrified the Christian world. Upon hearing of the deaths of John and Betty Stam, Frank Houghton wrote this hymn, which was inspired by 2 Corinthians 8:9: "... *that though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.*"

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor;
Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest man;
Stooping so low, but sinners raising
Heavenwards by thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest man.

Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Saviour and King, we worship thee.
Emmanuel, within us dwelling,
Make us what thou wouldst have us be.
Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Saviour and King, we worship thee.

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