

# ***The World is About to Turn to Love***

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Matthew 1:18–25

As we gather on this fourth Sunday of Advent, we don't actually tell the whole birth narrative that Matthew gave us. We jump right in at verse 18 and at least anyone who is speaking up here, would probably like to keep it that way. I'm guessing that's why the lectionary committee didn't start us right off the top with Matthew chapter 1, verse 1.

If you know about Matthew, you know why. It's those wild and crazy begats. Matthew begins his gospel with Jesus' genealogy all the way back to Abraham. There are some names that stand out—Abraham, Isaac, Tamar, Judah, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah—who did have a name—Bathsheba, King David, Solomon, Josiah, Manasseh, and then...things get a little fuzzy.

It's an interesting way to start a story about Jesus the Christ, which is who he was by the time Matthew was writing his gospel around 85 AD. Remember Matthew wants to connect Jesus with a larger story---the story of God at work in the world since the beginning. When Jesus gets older, he's compared to Adam, Abraham, Moses. Language about king David is included all throughout the gospel.

So when you think about it, Matthew begins his gospel right where makes sense for him. He starts with a long list of people, some who we know and some who we might need to go back and read about. This is where Jesus comes from and Matthew wants us to know this about him.

Instead of reading it, and you're welcome, I came across a song this week called "[Matthew's Begats](#)," by Andrew Peterson. Let's have a listen—it's the peppiest genealogy I've ever heard!

I have no idea what inspired him to write that song. But this morning, preachers all over the world are grateful. The tune will stick with you and at least the idea of singing your family tree will be in your head.

These were the people passing down stories at night to their kids, the ones bringing sacrifices to the altar, these are the ones telling the story of their faith. And all at the same time, these are some of the least savory people we read about in the Bible. There are murderers, evil kings, rapists, dumb kings, and even more. There are insiders, outsiders, victims, and the powerful. And all of them are here. There are four women listed in Jesus' lineage although, ahem, I think there were a few more. But the four listed, before his mother Mary, —Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, have some bit of scandal attached to them by the writers of the Bible, whether they were actually scandalous or perhaps suffered at the hand of a patriarchal society. But all of these people are included. I don't know about you, but I'm not always as eager to highlight some of the less savory characters when talking about my family.

But this is where Jesus comes from. These are his people. And Matthew wanted to start the story of Jesus the Christ this way.

That's what we know before we meet Mary and Joseph. Matthew doesn't give us too much detail about one of the most important people ever to be born. But he does tell us that Mary and Joseph were engaged and before they were married—or even living together, she found out she was pregnant. It's interesting in Matthew that we do not get to hear about how she felt or any way she might have responded to this news. We have Luke's account so engrained in us, that you, like I, might keep looking for another angelic visit. Or shepherds in the fields, or angels from the realms of glory. That's not here.

Joseph found out—or maybe he really knew all along, and was wrestling with what to do. Marry Mary anyway? Send her away? Deny he knew her? All were within his rights to do. While he wrestled, an angel visited him and let him know that the child within her a child of the Holy Spirit, that she will have a son, his name is to be Jesus, and all of this is to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that a child would come and be named Emmanuel—a reminder that God is with us.

Joseph woke with a startle, I imagine. He woke up and knew that he would not discard Mary, but would marry her.

They married, they welcomed this baby and Matthew says that Mary “bore Joseph a son.” Jesus was part of that long family we listed. He was named as Joseph's son.

There's a lot to unpack here, but I think at the root of all of it is love.

We were reading this familiar passage on Tuesday morning, with all its Holy Spirit talk and the majesty of Jesus' birth. Don Moore is always asking impossible questions, dripping with wisdom, and he offered this one for us, “well, how does any child come into the world, but by the Holy Spirit?”

Bob Sampson followed up with, “Isn't that the magic, mystery, and love in the act of creation?”

I frantically scribbled down what our sages brought to us because it hit that deep place.

To be born, to be created is to be created by Holy Spirit. To create anything in this world happens in the magic and mystery of love.

I don't know if Joseph loved Mary at that point. And we surely don't know if Mary loved Joseph. But I think they loved that baby and understood that God with us, was God was them. They knew where they came from and the love passed down to them. And Jesus was firmly in that creative, mysterious line of people who at least wrestled with the idea of what it might have meant to know God.

Mary giving birth to Jesus was risky. It was risky to Mary's health and well-being and place in society. It was risky to Joseph's place in the world. And yet, with the strong cloud of witnesses around them, love was born into the world. Nothing about it made sense, it wasn't a loud proclamation or anticipated by the masses. In Matthew's gospel it sounds like only two people even knew.

But when is a good time for love to be born anyway? We would always say it's not quite right yet—my decorations aren't up, the cookies aren't baked, the nursery isn't ready, the world is too crazy of a place.

Maybe it's always the right time for the world to turn to love. With the cloud of witnesses around us, we know who came before us—the good, the bad, the ugly, the ones who look just like us. Maybe that's the best news of us—that beyond everything that seems possible, we are still choosing one another and still choosing relationships centered on love.

In another week, where love might be hard to come by when you look around or watch the news, I want to share about this incredible stole that I'm wearing. Sylvia and Gary came by on Wednesday to deliver this beautiful stole to me. As we've talked about over the last few weeks, Sylvia went last weekend for the Christian Women Network's 10th anniversary event. She told me that the Cuban people told her they are in crisis. While she was there, they went to four places to find her a potato to eat for dinner.

Before she got there, the Christian Women's Network who serves communities all over the country had to cease traveling for two months because of the gasoline shortage and that stoppage of public transportation. Sylvia said that in all her trips she had never seen it so bad, because of the embargo, but also she felt love more deeply because of the commitment to sharing love.

The relationships are strong, the love of God is tangible, and the commitment to turn the world to love is constant. And while she was there, this Christian Women's Network was excited to hear an update about RBC, who like many of the churches where these ministers serve, had called a woman as pastor—just like them.

They gave Sylvia this beautiful, hand-painted stole for me to wear, a symbol of our partnership. Delivered to me, the week before the last Sunday of Advent—a Sunday when we'd talk about Mary, where we'd light the fourth candle, and the blues and purples of Advent would be swirling around us. And these soul friends in Cuba wanted all of us to know that we are loved.

It's nearly too much for me to take in, but I know one thing for sure—the world is turning to love with the powerful work of the women in Cuba. The Christian Women's Network, is bringing about the creativity and the mystery of God in ways that are full of Holy Spirit. They know they are surrounded by the faithful ones who came before them in their cloud of witnesses.

And so we remember who Jesus was—he was born of Mary, with Joseph as his dad, the child of sinners and saints and everyone in between. It would never have been the “right” time for him to be born and yet, every time is right.

Mary and Joseph set a pretty good example for us because they welcomed Love into the world in the way they were called to do.

When the world turns to love it means we are each welcoming love, to bring it into the world however we can. And the more love we bring, then more the world turns to it.

That's our promise of peace. That's our hope. And that's our joy.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.