

Advent 4 / December 21, 2025

Matthew 1:21-23

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins...And they shall call his name Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'"

Jesus and Immanuel

Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham. There are many genealogies in the bible, mostly in the Old Testament. Genealogies are important, because they ground the message of scripture in real time in the lives of real people. Genealogies are important to people today. Organizations like ancestry cater to people's need to know where they came from and the people from whom they are descended, especially if they were good people who accomplished great things. It seems that most people are descendants of great people. I haven't met many who admit to having bad people in their genealogy, although I suspect there must be a few skeletons in everyone's closet, including their ancestry.

Some people immerse themselves in the details of their genealogy. Personally, my mind is wandering by the third begat, and by the seventh, I've already forgotten the fourth begat. Jesus' genealogy in Matthew is important, whether you care for genealogies or not, because it shows Him the descendant of David to whom God promised an everlasting kingdom and a descendent of Abraham, through whose offspring He would bring blessing to all nations. Jesus gives the blessing of forgiveness and eternal life to all who receive Him as their Saviour and believe in Him as their Lord. Jesus saves us from our sins and gives us eternal life as our Immanuel!

Jesus has an interesting genealogy even for people who find genealogies tedious. Most people's genealogies are composed of good people who did great things. Apparently people who did bad things didn't have any children. Jesus' genealogy is filled with people who did bad things, some who did reprehensible things. His ancestry is traced through the patriarch Judah, who begat His ancestor Perez through his daughter in law Tamar. That's a red flag even in these permissive times! Jesus' ancestry goes through Bathsheba the wife of David, who stole her away from her first husband Uriah, at the cost of his life. Jesus according to His human line comes from a long line of sinners. Jesus' ancestry ends with Joseph,

who is of the house and lineage of David. Jesus' ancestry through David is important, because of the kingship and the promise of an eternal kingdom promised a descendent of David. In Luke's gospel the angel says to Mary, *"The Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."* Jesus through Joseph is heir of that promise!

However, it is important to note that Jesus is not a biological descendant of Joseph. Joseph is the adoptive father of Jesus, not His biological father. God is His Father, who begot Him in eternity. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus' genealogy comes through Joseph; His humanity comes through Mary. In the ancient world ancestry could come from biological relationship or through adoption into a family line. Jesus' ancestry is traced through Abraham non-biologically via adoption by Joseph. This is important, because our relationship with God as believers is also one of adoption. In the letter to the Galatians St. Paul writes, *"Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham."* We are all spiritual descendants of Abraham, adopted by God in baptism through faith in Abraham's perfect offspring, Jesus, our Immanuel.

Our gospel begins immediately following Jesus' genealogy with the narration of Joseph's discovery of Mary's pregnancy, which we know was by the Holy Spirit. Joseph wasn't so certain at first. Joseph was faced with a decision, to continue with Mary and take her as his wife and her child as his son, or to repudiate her and vindicate himself in the eyes of the community. At first Joseph was unwilling to continue with Mary and decided to separate from her quietly. The punishment for adultery, which included premarital relations, was stoning to death, though how often that was practiced was probably minimal. The law applied to both partners. By repudiating Mary, Joseph would have been testifying to his innocence; by repudiating her privately, he was not publicly condemning Mary, possibly sparing her legal condemnation.

However, even without a public divorce, the private repudiation of Mary would have caused her life long stigmatism in the community. Joseph knew he was not the father and, in a dream, as he considered these things, an angel assured him that God was in fact the child's Father. He would take Mary as his wife and the child she would bear would legally and genealogically be his son. Through Mary, Jesus received His humanity. Through Joseph, Jesus received His family name, adoption into the line of David and became heir to the title of Christ and the promise of an eternal kingdom.

Joseph named Him 'Jesus' as the angel who appeared to him instructed him. By naming the child, Joseph was taking Him as His own child. In giving the child, the name 'Jesus' in accordance with the words of the angel, Joseph was acknowledging Him as the Son of God Most High. By calling Him 'Immanuel', the Holy Spirit was confirming that more than a representative of God like the king of Judah or one of the prophets, Jesus is in fact the Son of God with us as a human being. The name 'Jesus' means, "The Lord saves." Jesus, the adopted son of Joseph, the Son of God Most High, would save His people from their sins, by being God with us as a human being.

Jesus, God and man, saves us from our sins in two ways; by His passive obedience and by His active obedience. Jesus saves us from our sins, actively by fulfilling all righteousness in our place. Jesus lived a life without sin in perfect obedience to His Father's will. Jesus saves us passively, by bearing the penalty and consequences of human sin through His death on the cross. Thus, it says in the letter to the Hebrews, *"since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."* Jesus saves us from our sins by being God with us as a human being.

These two names 'Jesus' and 'Immanuel' run throughout the scriptures like a golden thread. Jesus means the Lord Saves. It is a variation of the name 'Joshua', the successor of Moses, through whom the Lord brought Israel into the Promised Land. The Lord saves His people by preserving the offspring of Abraham, which again is most importantly an ancestry of faith. Abraham had many children. The spiritual and true children of Abraham are those who live with God by faith in God's promise. The promise to Abraham is traced through Jacob, his twelve sons and through their believing descendants. Most of Abraham's biological descendants through Ishmael and his other children, neither worshiped, or believed in the Lord. Even most of Abraham's biological descendants through Jacob were not believers. Throughout the history of Israel, most descendants of Abraham through Jacob, worshipped idols alongside of, or instead of the Lord. Through it all the Lord saved His people by preserving in all generations a believing remnant. In the fullness of time through that believing remnant, which included Joseph and Mary, the Lord came to save His people by sharing in our humanity in Jesus of Nazareth, Immanuel, God with us.

Immanuel means God is with us. The name appears several times in the book of Isaiah as a reminder the Lord was with His people in their afflictions, captivity and suffering. It was embodied in the tabernacle, by which God was present to Israel in the wilderness and the temple, by which He made His dwelling with His people in Jerusalem. God was with His faithful people Israel in the tabernacle and temple; forgiving their sins through the sacrificial system which pointed to Jesus and was fulfilled by His sacrifice. God was with Israel in the wilderness in the tabernacle, tent of meeting, temple and ark of the covenant.

When the temple was destroyed and Israel went into exile in Babylon, the Lord went with them through His word and Spirit. God was always with the faithful remnant of Israel in His word through His Spirit. God was with Israel most intimately through Jesus, in whose flesh the deity fully dwelt. John says of Jesus, *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* Literally, *"made his temple or tabernacle among us."* The true tabernacle and temple was the body of Jesus in which the deity dwells in its fulness. John says, *"We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* In Jesus, God is with us truly and fully. Jesus is God with us as our Saviour. Jesus is God with us in all struggles, trials and tribulations of our lives. Jesus is God with us in our sins as our Saviour, so that we would be with Him in the presence of the Father in His resurrection.

Jesus saves us from our sins by sharing in our humanity, fulfilling the law in our place and sacrificing Himself for our forgiveness. Jesus saves us in the atonement of our sin, so we would be with God in forgiveness by grace received through faith; fully and forever in our share of His resurrection. St. Paul wrote of Jesus in the letter to the Philippians, saying, *"Who though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* God in His grace bless us with faith in Jesus our Immanuel and bring our faith to fulfilment in His presence forever in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen

