

Introduction

When we begin to appreciate that the Gospels are not just detached, objective reports penned by disinterested observers, but that they are examples of how Jesus changes everything in our lives, then we see the real focus of the Christmas story. God sent His Son into the world to rescue people like us from our hopeless condition—being inheritors of Adam’s original sin, and active participants in sins all of our own doing, as well.

Jesus is not only the sinless Son of God, begotten by the Holy Spirit (without the seed of man), but He is the descendant of very sinful humans—both male and female. That truth embodies the message of God’s heart to us: though we descend from a long line of unrighteous ancestors, we can be made as sinless as Jesus if we become “born again [*from above*]” by the power of that same Holy Spirit.

God has a plan for the ending. All of human history is moving toward the grand climax, what we call the end of [*chronological*] time, when time will cease to be measured in terms of coming and going, and will be counted, instead, in continual fullness—when everything is always exactly as it should be, when everything has “come together” perfectly. Think of it this way: God is perpetually arranging things and working things toward that perfect end; despite our (often) wrong choices and sinful lapses—like those of Jesus’ ancestors—God will bring forth His ultimate purpose “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4):

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law...

God is in control. He has the final word, the ultimate say. And He is patient, as well as full of mercy and grace. To this God, we get to bring the meager offering of our life.

God’s Plan for the Ending

A. Matthew (Levi) the Tax Collector (Luke 5:27–32)

1. The New Testament begins with narration by a social outcast and collaborator.
2. From the outset we’re introduced to an essential, but *heretofore* inconceivable reality: Jesus—fully Son of Man and Son of God.
 - a. Born not of Adam’s *seed*, but of a woman’s (only).
 - b. Descended of ABRAHAM (covenant), DAVID (kingdom) and exiles (deliverance).
 - c. Descended of *women*, none of whom were off to a good start!!
 - 1) TAMAR, who has a child by her father-in-law

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- 2) RAHAB, who runs a brothel and betrays her own people
 - 3) RUTH, a foreigner who marries the son of a prostitute
 - 4) BATHSHEBA, an adulteress who marries her husband's killer
- d. Descended of *men*, who were even worse than the women!!
3. Writing primarily to his fellow Jews, Matthew draws upon Old Testament passages to convince his listeners that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.

a. *A virgin will bear a Son called Immanuel*

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

b. *The star of the One who will have dominion*

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab...One from Jacob shall have dominion..." (Numbers 24:17, 19)

c. *Out of puny Bethlehem will come a Ruler/Shepherd*

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." (Micah 5:2)

d. *God's Son will be called out of Egypt*

God brings him out of Egypt, He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with his arrows. (Numbers 24:8)

When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. (Hosea 11:1)

B. Real People, Real life

1. God is in control of the ultimate outcome. He gives supernatural revelation and guidance in the midst of life's sordid and mundane elements.
2. People respond dramatically to the unexpected.

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- a. MARY, as yet unmarried, is found to be with child by the Holy Spirit—something she cannot explain in natural terms to her detractors.
 - b. JOSEPH, uncertain what to do, risks ridicule and *takes her as his wife*, simply because he felt God leading him to do so.
 - c. Seeing a new star, the MAGI travel far, rejoicing in its guidance, and eventually decide to fall down in worship to an infant.
 - d. HEROD, fearing the loss of his powers and prerogatives, slaughters everything that even resembles a work of God in his life.

C. The Significance of Jesus' Name

1. JESUS = *Yeshua* = *God-saved; the Lord saves; God who is salvation*
2. IMMANUEL = *God [living] with us [identifying with our present condition]*