

Christmas Fit for a King

The King of Recemptive Love

December 18, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – The Year of the Lord’s Favor (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasis in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point:

As the world awakens from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “*the year of the Lord’s favor*” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new possibilities with God this year and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: Matthew 1:17-25

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Commentary:

The genealogies of the Bible may seem repetitive and unnecessary to the gospel plotline, but they were included purposefully. The messianic story as recorded in Matthew's opening genealogy is remarkably inclusive, extending to women and men of all nations. Inclusiveness is not merely a contemporary buzzword. It is a deep note sounded in the first paragraph of the New Testament, a paragraph that sums up the story of the Old Testament, binding together the two books of the covenant (*testament* means "covenant" in both Hebrew and Greek) into one book of the story of God's saving acts in history. God's purpose is to include all.

This inaugural note of inclusiveness corresponds to the inclusiveness of the whole genealogy, which names five women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, "the wife of Uriah", and Mary. Since ancestry and inheritance were traced through the father's line, reference to women in genealogy was uncommon. Matthew is interested in affirming that the plan of God has often been fulfilled in history in unanticipated and "irregular" ways, as was the case in the birth of Jesus from Mary, and that Matthew is interested in showing that God worked through irregular, even scandalous ways, and through women who took initiative, like Tamar and Ruth. Yet the main reason for Matthew's inclusion of these women corresponds to one of the Gospel's primary themes: the inclusion of the Gentiles in the plan of God from the beginning. All of the men in Jesus' genealogy are necessarily Jewish. But the four women mentioned, with the exception of Mary, are "outsiders," Gentiles, or considered to be such in Jewish tradition. Just as the following story shows Jesus to be the fulfillment of both Jewish and Gentile hopes, so also the genealogy shows that the Messiah comes from a Jewish line that already includes "outsider" Gentiles as well as deeply flawed members of the "chosen people" who consistently miss the mark of God's love. Everyone is in profound need of the King of redemptive love.

- Adapted from the New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Vol VIII, p. 132

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, Jesus represents the 7th group of 7 descended from Abraham. Since the number 7 is typically associated with 'completeness' or fulfillment in the Scriptures, what do you think Matthew is seeking to communicate about Jesus?
2. The great story of Scripture is about God working through Israel to be a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). How does the inclusion of Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy reflect that calling to reach out to all?

3. How does the inclusion of very flawed leaders of Israel in Jesus' genealogy (think of Jacob the deceiver, David the adulterer/murderer, Manasseh the apostate) reflect God's passion to "save people from their sins" through the one named Jesus (Matthew 1:21)?
4. Joseph was initially put off by the irregularity of Mary's pregnancy, but he ultimately receives the angelic message and is obedient to God's irregular path. What stands out to you about Joseph's role in this story?
5. Does God's willingness to work through irregular people and irregular processes encourage you or puzzle you? Why?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Matthew 1:21 "*She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*"