

Wednesday, December 18, 2019 – Advent Midweek III
“Jesus, the Son of Mary”

Matthew 1: 18-25

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Process Structure

Adapted from CSL “Who is Jesus”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Who is Jesus? That’s the question we’re asking this Advent, using Matthew 1 to guide us. Who is Jesus? It’s the most important question that we can ever ask. Who is Jesus? Some say Jesus is a therapist—he helps us cope with life’s problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves. Some say Jesus is a coffee lover—he drinks fair-trade organic coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid, and goes to film festivals. Some say Jesus is a coach—he helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls. Some say Jesus is a hippie—he teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagines a world without religion, and helps us remember that “all you need is love.” Some say Jesus is a spiritual guru—he hates religion, churches, pastors, priests, and doctrine, and would rather have people out in nature, finding “the god within.” Some say Jesus is a revolutionary—he teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on “the system.” Some say Jesus is a good example—he shows us how to help people and change the planet.

And then there’s the real Jesus—the biblical Jesus, the Jesus of Matthew 1 that announces that Jesus is the Son of David, the Son of Abraham... and today we see that Jesus is the Son of Mary.

Who is Jesus? Jesus ushers in the final act in God’s plan of salvation. Jesus brings our story to completion. How so? His two names connected to Mary complete everything that is lacking in our lives.

Matthew 1:18, “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” Mary conceives Jesus through the Holy Spirit. You remember. At first Joseph is hesitant to believe it. We can’t blame him! So God sends an angel who speaks to Joseph in a dream. Joseph is convinced. His anxiety is gone. Joseph believes the unbelievable.

Joseph chooses to trust God and love Mary. The two now live together and share a home. This will most certainly raise some eyebrows in their hometown of Nazareth. Busybodies standing on the street corner will assume that Joseph and Mary conceived the child during their engagement instead of waiting to be married. “What nerve, those two!” Nazareth was a very small town—only 2,000 people lived there—so gossip of this sort would travel quickly.

Matthew continues, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). “Jesus” is the English form of the Hebrew name, “Joshua.” It means “Yahweh (the LORD) saves.” The child’s name is Joshua—or Jesus—because this Son will save his people from their sins.

And we need it! Oh God, do we need it! We are so incomplete without it! We have economic problems—yet if all our economic problems vanished today, our lives still wouldn’t be perfect. If all our political problems vanished today, our lives still wouldn’t be perfect. If all our psychological problems vanished today or all our family problems or all our health problems were solved, our lives would still be empty and lack completion.

Who are we? We are people who need to be saved from our sins. That’s because—contrary to what most of us think most of the time—we are not Superman or Superwoman. We cannot save ourselves. Every political, social, or psychological problem is the result of our fallen condition. That’s why Jesus didn’t come as an economist, a sociologist, or as a family therapist. His name is Jesus, “because he will save his people from their sins.”

I experience joy and peace when I recognize that I can’t bring my life to a successful conclusion. I just can’t. And I’ve tried. God, I’ve tried! My biggest problem is me, and so I need a Savior to rescue me from my sins. If we come to Jesus for any other reason—maybe we hope he will make us popular or successful—we will be disappointed. Jesus has more important problems to solve than our unpopularity or our failures. Those are just symptoms. Jesus lays down his life to save us from the sin alienating us from God and from each other and threatening to destroy us.

Jesus, the Son of Mary, is our Savior. Jesus isn’t another prophet; another rabbi; another wonder-worker. Jesus was the one they had been waiting for—to complete God’s story of salvation; to deliver his people from exile; to establish God’s reign and rule; to heal the sick,

give sight to the blind, freedom to the prisoners and proclaim Good News to the poor; to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet [Is 7:14]: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘God with us’” (Mt 1:22–23).

Jesus, the Son of Mary, is not only our Savior from sin. Jesus, the Son of Mary, is Immanuel God with us—up close and personal. Immanuel is also God in us and God behind us and Immanuel is God going before us. Jesus is God—up close and personal—entering our muck and mire, our chaos and our deep confusion.

We see it most profoundly on the day of deepest darkness. On that day we all grabbed hold of Immanuel, nailed him to a cross and cried out, “Leave us alone! Leave us alone!” To this day, our every sin demands just that—for us to be left alone by God, forever. On the other side of Good Friday, though, Immanuel lives! There was the cradle and there was the cross. But, conquering death, Immanuel now wears the crown.

Jesus, God with us, completes our story! He isn’t a figment of our imagination or the projection of our own desires. Jesus is the Lord our God. Jesus is the Savior of the world, and the substitute for all our sin. Jesus is more loving, more holy, and more wonderfully merciful than we ever thought possible.

Every last bit of God’s forgiveness, grace and love are packaged and delivered to us in two marvelous Hebrew names—Jesus and Immanuel. They complete your life, your story, and these names are his Christmas gifts for you, forevermore! In Jesus’ name, Amen.