

## CHRISTMAS EVE HOMILY 2016

Isaiah 62: 1-5 + Acts of the Apostles 13: 16-17, 22-25 + Matthew 1: 1-25  
Holy Spirit Catholic Church: 5 p.m. & midnight, December 24, 2016

I noticed the eyes of some of you glazing over as you listened to that long list of strange names, like Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, and Abiud.

Many of you may be wondering: What happened to the traditional Christmas story? You know, the one with the angels appearing to shepherds with the good news of the Savior's birth and the infant being born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, placed in a manger, surrounded by animals.

There are actually 2 accounts of Jesus' birth--- the one most familiar to us is from the Gospel of Luke--- the one with the shepherds, swaddling clothes, and manger scene. But the other one, which we hear proclaimed on this Holy Night, is from the evangelist Matthew.

Each of these infancy narratives have something to teach us about the incredible mystery of God becoming human out of love for sinful humankind. Since we began the "Year of Matthew" this Advent, and will be nourished by Matthew's Gospel throughout 2017, it would be good to learn what Matthew's infancy narrative has to teach us.

What Matthew conveys to his original audience, made up of Jews who had recently converted to Christianity, is that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to his chosen people, Israel.

That God has been at work from the very beginning, starting with Abraham, their "father in faith", and throughout their history, in preparing the way for the coming of the promised Messiah, who would spring from King David's own line.

The evangelist Matthew reveals that God is always faithful to God's promises.

By means of a genealogy, Matthew conveys this remarkable truth of how God works through sinful human beings to prepare the way for the coming of His only Son into the world.

Think about the humility of God to lower God's self to be grafted onto the family tree of sinful humanity.

The Greek word which has been translated into the English word “genealogy” is more accurately translated as “genesis”---which means “origin” or “beginning” --- like the title of the first book of the Bible.

How fitting that Matthew should begin his Gospel with this word—“genesis”--- because by the coming of the Son of God into the world there will be a new beginning, a re-creation, a restoration of the human race to God’s friendship.

What the evangelist conveys by his long list of the ancestors of Jesus is that the Son of God recreates and restores humankind by becoming fully part of the human race, sharing its weaknesses, and even its mortality.

Even though the Son of God is without sin, He becomes fully part of sinful humanity, with ancestors, who each in their own way, turned away from God, but God remained faithful to them.

This list is made up of saints and sinners, kings and patriarchs, prostitutes and foreigners, heroes and villains, knaves and knuckleheads.

Such as Jacob who tricks his brother, Esau, out of his inheritance and becomes part of Jesus’ family tree.

Or King Ahaz, who we heard about last Sunday, who tests God’s patience & wears God out. Or King David, a prime example of the sinful ancestors of Jesus who God uses to prepare the way for the coming of His Son.

David was not only a great king, poet and lover of God, but also a great sinner— a murderer and a slave to his lusts.

Remarkably, God could use even David to prepare the way for the coming of his Son into the world.

Repentant David, acknowledging his sins and begging for God’s mercy, would come to be known as “a man after God’s own heart.”

God would promise David that from his descendants would come the promised Messiah, who would be known as “the son of David.”

What tremendous dignity God acknowledges mankind to possess when he reveals to it a mystery that has been contained within the very fiber and flesh of generation after generation!

God reveals to man not only the being of God in His Son:

God reveals man to himself in all his hidden possibilities.

Who could have foreseen that a woman of our race could become the mother of the eternal God’s only Son?

Who could have suspected humanity's hidden talent to be able to bear God in the most intimate, physiological sense possible—as a mother bears a child, with everything that implies for the interpenetration of two beings?

Without knowing it, each of us is a bearer of mystery like Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, and Abiud, even though we are more anonymous than they. Each of us, too, is caught up in a genealogy, both biological and spiritual, and we each bear the tremendous Mystery that is the personal presence of God among us and within us.... But we are almost wholly ignorant of who we are and what promises sleep deep within us.

Nelson Mandela touches on this truth by stating we must face the fear of our greatness, because in the end this is the greatest fear of all.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who are we to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are we not to be? We are a child of God.

Our playing small does not serve the world....

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us; it is in Everyone!

And as we let our own light shine,

we unconsciously give other people the permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

God, in God's great humility, continues to come to us through others, through other sinful human beings, and through us to others still.

Jesus is counting on us to bring His saving love into the world!

Encountering the liberating love of the Son of God coming to us through others, we give ourselves more fully to Him who sets us free from the burden of our sins.

The Son of David reveals to us who God is as Jesus translates God for us.

In the person of Jesus and in the event of his Incarnation, we see that “God” means: “He who saves in the flesh out of love.”

God's true name cannot be any other than Jesus, and by His Name, by his person, we are saved, we are re-created, we are re-stored, we are re-newed.

By descending all the way to us in Christ Jesus, the glory of God transforms the earth, and the hearts of men and women, into a 2<sup>nd</sup> heaven.

For in Jesus, the builder of the universe has become one with his glorious creation.  
For in Jesus, humankind is forever united (married) to God.

In Jesus, we have been given a new name---God's delight!

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*