



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 6—Jesus and His Church

Lesson 1: The Birth of Jesus, A King—Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

It is generally understood that the genealogies in Matthew's first chapter and Luke's third chapter have four significant aspects. Each of these important truths played a significant role in the Jewish people of the day understanding who Jesus really was and why God sent Him into the world.

First, Matthew, the gospel writer, wanted to be sure to accentuate to the readers and hearers that Jesus was indeed human. Along with His divinity, Jesus was also human. Jesus' traceable roots were through Joseph, who was Jesus' legal father. This would be a huge piece of information for any Jew who understood the prophesy within the lineage of their history. Jesus was indeed a descendant of both David and Abraham, thus the fulfillment of known prophecies and covenants.

Second, Matthew wanted to be sure to establish the miracle and awe under which Jesus was born. This is one of the key aspects of the birth of Christ—born to an ordinary family for the reason of extraordinary things. Jesus Christ came to redeem people from their sin. This is extraordinary work that only God can do, though God chooses an ordinary family in which to raise God's Son.

Meanwhile Luke desired for the readers and hearers of his story to be reminded of the promise made to the entire human race, through Abraham. While Matthew's genealogy only goes as far back as Abraham, Luke's goes the distance—all the way back to the firstborn, Adam. Luke desired that Jesus be known as the Anointed One, the Chosen One to rescue and save the entire human race.

Finally, it is also understood that both Matthew and Luke wanted to give evidence that Jesus was not a political king but rather a spiritual king. Jesus was not to lead the Jews and thwart the governmental reign of Rome. Rather, Jesus was born into this world to save all peoples—Jew and Gentile. Jesus was the express representation of God on earth. Jesus' birth proved that God was who God said God was—a God for all people. The mystery of God becoming a man is to be celebrated, not merely a short history lesson.

It is important to note that, yes, Matthew and Luke have very different genealogies of Jesus' birth as well as different accounts of the actual birth event. Matthew has many, many fewer details as to actual birth event. It is likely, therefore, that Luke was writing with a firsthand account of Mary's personal story, whereas Matthew had not.

Regarding the genealogies most pastors and scholars conclude that Luke is recording Mary's genealogy and Matthew is recording Joseph's. Matthew is following the line of Joseph through David's son Solomon, while Luke is following the line of Mary, though David's son Nathan. However, Jesus is a descendant of David and therefore worthy to be the Messiah, as prophesied. Using the genealogy of the mother is unusual for certain. However, so was the entire virgin birth!

Jesus is the King. Jesus came to rule in our hearts and minds. Jesus came to be the King of God's new society—a society or kingdom made up of people who declare Jesus is Lord of their life. God sent a King, to

reign over us, to rule over us to chart the course for the way we should live. The Israelites were longing for a king as they had been promised throughout their heritage with God. However, Jesus was not a political king but a King of God's eternal kingdom.

GOD'S STORY

The birth of Jesus not only gives us a glimpse of how Jesus was born, but it also gives us a great glimpse of who God really is. From the birth of Jesus we are reminded that God is immanent, transcendent, immutable and incomprehensible.

God's immanence means that God is not operating as God distantly or in isolation from God's creation. Although distinct from creation, meaning not a created being as humans, animals and nature, God is present. God dwells among God's creation, as we see in the birth of Jesus.

God's transcendence means that God is superior to God's creation and Jesus is proof of God's transcendence. God is independent of this world, yet in God's grace and mercy, chooses to be immanent or within it.

God's immutability means that God does not change. God is the same God yesterday, today and forever. God's nature of love is unchanging. We see this throughout the entire biblical narrative but especially in the birth of Jesus. God's love for humanity, God's desire for reconciliation with humanity and God's desire for restoration of all of creation does not wane. It does, however, grow as a kingdom grows.

Finally, some aspects of God are incomprehensible. God and the works of God cannot be fully explained or fully described. We are able to have fractional understanding and knowledge but never exhaustive knowledge.

OUR STORY

Jesus is the King, as we have already established. Just what does it mean that Jesus ought to be the King of our lives, though? How ought our individual lives and the society or the kingdom in which Jesus came to establish then live?

If Jesus is Lord (the King) of our life, then He reigns in all of our life. This means that we:

1. **Renounce self**—this means we are to give up living for self and live for the sake of the gospel (for the sake of the world).
2. **Submit all of who we are**—this means that we surrender all of who we are to the will of God. We are not here for our own sake, but for the sake of the world. This means that we use all of the gifts, talents and skills that we have to bear witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in the world.
3. **Submit all of what we have**—this means that we are not to possess anything but a commitment to Jesus. We ought not let anything consume or possess us by possessing it—money, jobs, relationships, hobbies—all of it is under the reign of Jesus, our Lord.
4. **Trust in Him to lead**—this means we are to give ourselves to the directing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus rules as King in our lives when we are attentive to the promptings of the Spirit and allow ourselves to be governed by the Spirit's involvement in our life and world as opposed to our own.
5. **Respond in obedience to Jesus' teachings**—this means that we actively participate in Jesus' mission of loving God and loving others. When we are under the reign of Jesus, the King, we are looking for ways to respond to the needs of this world. Responding to the needs of the world, through and under the direction of the Holy Spirit is how the world knows that God exists and loves them.

The bottom line is when we live under the reign of Jesus as the Lord of our life, absolutely every facet of our life is given to Jesus. All of who and what we are is laid at Jesus' feet or the work of God's redemption in the world. Jesus is Savior, no doubt, but He is also Lord.

OTHERS' STORY

The kingdom of God is the reign of an everlasting, sovereign God over all creatures and over all things. Jesus is its King, and we live under His reign. The kingdom of God is also the term Christians use to define the realm of salvation we enter when we become followers of Jesus. When we experience this rebirth, we then become part of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God welcomes all of creation, both in heaven and on earth. The kingdom is comprised of those who are willingly submissive to the Lord and choose to live in peaceful community with God, self, others and the cosmos. The kingdom of God is eternal and it is spiritual. All those who choose to believe and follow in the ways of Jesus are found within the kingdom. The kingdom of God, therefore, is the people of God who choose to live under the reign of Christ and also choose to love God and love others. So with that in mind, the kingdom of God is both here and now as all believers are choosing to live within it, and it is not yet. The not-yet kingdom represents all of the believers who will live in the presence of God for eternity.

We live with others in this kingdom. This kingdom is a society of citizens whose mark is love. It is in this love that we find authentic community with other citizens in this kingdom. Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out the kingdom values that Christ taught and modeled. Citizens of the kingdom of God, who live under God's reign and the lordship of Jesus value:

1. telling the truth and keeping their word
2. generous living and a desire to serve others
3. living the perfect love of God by blessing and praying for others—even those who are our enemies
4. forgiving others and seeking peace with all
5. keeping God, and others first, not their own interests
6. honoring the convictions of others
7. striving for holiness in all areas of their lives

These values contribute to a community that serves others and reflects the virtues of Jesus.

THE WORLD'S STORY

Most citizens of the kingdom of God have a deep and sincere desire for all people of the earth to enter the kingdom for themselves. Christians long for broken people to be made whole. The gospel is the story of God's will, way and work of providing salvation and justice for all through Jesus Christ, God's Son, for the sake of the whole world. This is why the Church exists—to make disciples who make disciples. These disciples, then, live in such a way as to bear witness to the work of Jesus on the cross.

Even though we strongly desire to live under the reign of Christ and long for others to also, we are scared. We are scared to tell others about Jesus. It is uncomfortable and in some cases can be life-threatening. We fear the loss of friendships, family conflict, rejection and a host of other fears. It is normal to be scared but we must get past being scared if we are to proclaim and perform the gospel, therefore bearing witness of the kingdom of God.

Here are several ways to overcome the fear of proclaiming and performing the gospel story:

- Trust that Jesus is with you, as He promised in the Great Commission
- Trust that the Holy Spirit goes out before you.
- Trust that God is active in the world and what we are doing is simply joining God where God is already at work.
- Trust your own story of redemption
- Trust that the Scriptures are living and active
- Trust your approach—no one knows your family and friends like you!