

Matthew 1:18-25 The Divine Love Story
Romans 1:1-7
December 21, 2025

It has always been an important part of the Christian faith that, when Jesus was born, something happened to the world, and all the people in it. The story of the Christ as revealed in scripture, is less something that happened to one group of people, in one brief time, in one corner of the world than something that has happened to us all, for us all.

We tell the story in terms of its particular time and place, its attachment to the historic faith of Israel. Supporting the idea of the universal reach of the gospel beyond its originating culture are the claims made about acceptance of those outside the faith of Israel who also benefit from its spiritual heritage.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he makes a point to mention the importance of the double heritage of Jesus as a descendant of David and the Son of God. And he includes the following line in his greeting;

“Through him we received grace and apostleship to call *all the Gentiles* to the obedience that comes from faith.”

The story of the birth as it is told in Matthew’s gospel emphasizes also the lineage of Joseph, who is a descendant of the Israelite King David, and the account of the Magi, foreigners who traveled a great

distance to acknowledge the importance of the miraculous birth.

Today, we gather on the Sunday before the celebration of Christ’s birth as descendants of the ones called Gentile. Before we are finished with the season we will have taken the time to listen again to the stories of the sojourn to Judea to enroll in the census, and of the shepherds in the countryside around Bethlehem and the angelic message they received of peace and goodwill to all people.

We will hear again the story of the Magi from the east who followed a star to the place where Jesus lived to present their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And we will turn once more to the prologue of the Gospel of John and hear about the meaning behind of the Incarnation, Word made flesh, full of grace and truth.

And we have developed our own diverse traditions that are very meaningful to us. We buy gifts and wrap them to be placed under decorated trees that adorn our living rooms for a month or so, and we give them to our loved ones when we get the chance. There are lights and beloved television shows like, “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” and movies like, A Christmas Story” and, “Its A Wonderful Life.”

There are both sacred and secular songs to sing; “Angels We Have Heard on High,” “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” and, “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” and “White Christmas.” And the food, all

the cookies and candy that help us to celebrate this marvelous event in which even those who are not believers in Jesus don't mind participating.

Somewhere in the mix of it all someone will suggest that we be reminded of the, "true meaning of Christmas." Ordinarily they mean that it is good to remember that it is a celebration of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. To honor that suggestion we do will to take in thoughts of the end of the story, about the Cross and the empty tomb.

The name Jesus is a variation on the Hebrew name, "Joshua, which is a prayer and an answer to prayer; the prayer is, "save us." The answer is, "the one who saves." The text tells us also that he will be called, "Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

The birth and life and death of Jesus addresses each of us at the deepest and most foundational level of our humanity. It does not address us in terms of our particular characteristics; rich or poor, male or female, strong or weak, but simply as human beings, in terms of what we share in common, and not what separates us.

It does not address us by racial and ethnic distinctions, by political or religious affiliation nor class, vocation or education level. All of these things are too close to the surface of our lives.

It speaks of the trouble we are in, the common features of life we share, and the demands we face.

Some of life's features are such that we must conclude we are unable to meet the demands and are not sufficient to achieve or even participate in our own redemption. The biggest problems we face are unsolvable, having to do with mortality; in spite of the over zealous claims of those who speak of, "practical immortality," we are yet subject to death.

We are also told that we all sin. I know of only a few who would deny it. There is a moral demand that hovers over every aspect of our lives. The effort to dispense with it or remove it or meet its demands is doomed to failure. Those who say there is no such thing are living in a delusion. But we have clever ways of giving it lip service without giving it the attention it deserves.

And then there is the question of meaning. What *is* the source of meaning in life? *Is* there meaning in life? To say there is no meaning means that how we live doesn't matter. There is no significance to goodness and its deeds. There is no significance to evil and *its* deeds.

In end the pursuit of health and goodness carry no weight because they are beyond our reach. Much of the time we address our concerns about such things in terms of daily realities; personal pursuits, political life, church attendance and religious life. But we do not solve the problems either for ourselves, for each other, or for the world.

The Incarnation, the arrival of Christ as a human being, subject to the threats and vulnerabilities

common to humanity, offers a divine solution to the problem of our lives. It reveals to us that God has addressed human failures and limitations by his own sacrifice and presence, which comes to us as gift and accompanies us throughout life, instructing and encouraging us, shaping our character and strengthening us, and giving meaning to all we do.

In view of that gift, we are told to *believe*, and in believing, to love, and to be filled with peace, joy, and hope, demands that are themselves beyond our reach but also gifts given, grounded in God's love for each of us. It is the birth in us of *that* salvation that gives joy to this time of the year and gives meaning to our lives as we live them out with friends all around.

Even when the word love is not used, and it is absent in both the birth narratives from Matthew and Luke, the immersion into God's love is manifest throughout the Christmas stories. Perhaps the best way to honor this gospel and to celebrate this birth *is* to speak it aloud. It is the divine love story.

Meaning is found in relationships, first to God, and extended to the family of faith; neighbor and friend. It is expressed in the great commands about Love of God and neighbor, of the fellowship, even of enemy, as an extension of the divine love expressed through the coming of Christ, Son of David, Son of God.

For God so Loved the world that he gave . . .

Merry Christmas

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