

Sunday Service ~ January 19, 2025

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

Welcome to Church. Today we have another chance to come to our great and mighty God and worship the king of Kings and the Lord of Lords. As we prepare to do so let us turn to Psalm 91 and remind us ourselves why this is such a good thing to do.

Psalm 91. *"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' ³ Surely, he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴ He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. ⁹ If you say, 'The LORD is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, ¹⁰ no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; ¹² they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. ¹⁴ 'Because he loves me,' says the LORD, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. ¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.'"*

Let us pray. *Father, we thank you for church this morning. Whether we are seated at home or in the building together, we thank you for the salvation we enjoy. Forgive us for the times this week when we have forgotten your goodness and greatness. We are sinful. We are selfish. We deserve to face the storm of your justice and wrath. Lord, we ask for your mercy and grace. We thank you that Christ bore the judgement we deserve, in his body, on the tree, but then three days later, rose from death, victorious, the risen, conquering king. We thank you for our forgiveness. We thank you for our assurance of salvation. We thank you that heaven is our home. Who else could rescue me from my failing? Who else would offer His only Son? Who else invites me to call Him Father Only a Holy God. Amen*

Song – Only a Holy God https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jxn_fu6rdCU

Who else commands all the hosts of heaven?
Who else could make every king bow down?
Who else can whisper and darkness trembles?
Only a Holy God

What other beauty demands such praises?
What other splendour outshines the sun?
What other majesty rules with justice?
Only a Holy God

Chorus
Come and behold Him
The One and the Only
Cry out, sing holy
Forever a Holy God
Come and worship the Holy God

What other glory consumes like fire?
What other power can raise the dead?
What other name remains undefeated?
Only a Holy God

Chorus x2

Who else could rescue me from my failing?
Who else would offer His only Son?
Who else invites me to call Him Father?
Only a Holy God
Only my Holy God

Chorus x2

Bible Reading – Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet¹⁹ did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ 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." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Pastoral Prayer

Pray for Libya. (Population 7 million, Christians 35,000). Due to lawlessness and extremism, there is no safe part of Libya for believers. Please pray for stability and that order will come to Libya. Ask God to protect migrant Christians from Islamic extremists. Pray that God would help His people be able to find fellowship with one another.

Pray for Audric and Elise as they prepare to minister among us. Pray that they might have a good rest after the busyness of the end of last year with a new child, a new job, Christmas and a move all in a couple of months. Pray that they might settle into their new home. That their girls might make new friends. That God will use them to encourage us more in the faith.

Pray for Australia. For a sense of unity within our diversity. For a shared vision of what a better Australia might look like. For stable government. And that the Lord would become the most important thing in our lives.

Pray for Woy Woy Presbyterian (Sam C to provide)

Bible Reading – Matthew 2:1-18 (NIV)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. ¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the

prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." ¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Song – In Christ Alone

Alison Krauss - YouTube

1. In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand

2. In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

3. There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

4. No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Sermon – Paul Barnes

Matthew 1-2: The Unexpected Messiah

Given I have 3 young kids, we own an almost countless number of kids Bibles and booklets that contain the Christmas story. And one thing that is very clear in them is that we have a very sanitised view of the Christmas story today. And for good reason - they're usually aimed at children. These stories have friendly angels, wise men giving neatly wrapped presents, and a safe and receptive world ready to welcome its saviour.

Yet Matthew 1-2 presents a different version: it begins with a rather boring genealogy, then we have a suspicious husband, a paranoid ruler, indifferent religious leaders, strangers giving weird presents no child would ever enjoy for their birthday, and an atrocious act of infanticide. So, why does Matthew mention these things?

In ancient biographies, birth stories were used to tell us something about the person and purpose of the main character. Matthew uses his birth stories to present key aspects of the coming of the Messiah who although he is predicted in the Old Testament, he isn't exactly what people expected. So, let's now turn to Matthew 1 and this genealogy.

1) Family Matters

If you have ever read the Bible from start to finish in a year, then you'll know that you spend about 9 months on the Old Testament. And by the minor prophets you really want to get to Jesus. Then you turn the page to Matthew and the first thing is a genealogy. It's not that exciting. So why is it here? What was Matthew wanting to show about Jesus' ancestry?

In my own family my nan (my mum's mum) was of Irish decent, and when we were growing up my nan constantly reminded us of our strong Irish Catholic heritage – so committed were our ancestors to the Irish Catholic cause that we had relatives who led rebellions against the hated protestant British in 1798. For an Irish Catholic, my family line was something to be proud of and to tell people.

It was similar in the 1st century. In the first century Jewish genealogies had several purposes, but you usually wanted to do 2 things: to highlight your family's Jewish purity; and to almost brag about famous ancestors.

But Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is different as you have 4 types of people mentioned:

A) Jewish heroes: People like Abraham, David, Hezekiah are the people any Jew would want to highlight, show everyone I'm related to these guys. Abraham was promised that his descendants would bless the world – and Matthew is going to show that this promise is fulfilled in through the ministry of Jesus. David is promised that one of his descendants would be the coming forever ruler – again, Matthew uses his gospel to show this. Hezekiah is a faithful king to God. These are all heroes of the faith that books are still written about.

B) Bad apples: These are those that you don't mention. This is typified by Manasseh who in 2 Kings 21 is so evil that he is blame for the exile. 2 Kings 21:10-12 states that **"10 The Lord said through his servants the prophets: 11 "Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. 12 Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle."** He even sacrifices his own son to a pagan god. How would you feel being reminded of an ancestor like that?

The Irish rebel leader I'm related to gets capture in 1798 and sent to Australia as a convict and, in a part of the story my nan left out, he eventually became a violent drunk who was dishonourably discharged from the local police force. It's strange being related to a guy who I was told to admire but who became the type of person I don't admire at all. And Matthew lists a whole heap of them for Jesus. Jesus isn't like these men at all.

C) Women: Most genealogies don't mention women at all but not only does Jesus' mention women, it mentions the wrong ones. You've got sexually immoral women, foreign women, and sexually immoral foreign women. Tamar is impregnated by her father-in-law Judah. Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute. Ruth is a foreigner. Bathsheba is an adulteress. Where are the Jewish heroines like Sarah or Deborah or Rachel?

D) Nobodies: The names found in verses 12-16 have no historical record – they are nobodies, why bother mentioning them?

Why this strange list of sinners, saints, foreigners, sexually immoral women, child sacrificers, nobodies? Because that is who Jesus has come to save. Most Jews in the first century (and Christians today) thought the Messiah would save them from these types of people. That the problem with the world were the idolators, sexually immoral, foreigners. But through this long list of names Matthew is highlighting that the

Messiah has come to save these types of people. One of the main points of Matthew, which begins in this genealogy, is that we should never consider anyone too evil, or too lost, or too anything for Jesus to save them.

But what is he saving them from?

2) Mission

In 63 B.C the Roman general Pompey took Jerusalem and, in an act that no Jewish person would ever forget, walked into the Holy of Holies in the temple. A gentile army general desecrating the most holy place for Jews, who were helpless against it. Surely the Messiah would right this wrong.

The *Psalms of Solomon*, which is not in the Bible and is written in the first century BC, states that the mission of the Messiah will be: **“Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David...in order that he may reign over Israel your servant. And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample (her) down to destruction. Wisely, righteously he shall thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance; he shall destroy the arrogance of the sinner as a potter's jar.”**

See for many Jews, the coming Messiah’s “salvation” was a combination of the removal of the Roman pagans, and the restoration of political independence. And how this would be achieved ranged from violent revolution (the Zealots) to just an increasing dedication to the Law of Moses (the Pharisees). Because if the people being destroyed are “sinners”, we must to righteous.

But in Matthew 1:21 the angel reveals the mission of the Messiah - **“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.”** Really? Sin is the greatest issue? We take it for granted that Jesus came to die for sins. But for someone in the 1st century with Roman oppression, taxes for land, produce, the temple, the ever-encroaching influence of pagan religions, personal sin would have struggled to register as the greatest issue. But that’s the problem with allowing us to use our circumstances define our greatest need.

Kenneth Bailey in his book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* writes about Matthew 1:21 - “The concept of *sin* is shaped by what people are enduring from their oppressors, and the word *salvation* is used to express their longing to be free from that oppression. For such a community there is little space in the mind to tolerate anyone talking about its sins and its need for salvation from those sins. An oppressed community perceives its own faults as dwarfed by the enormity of what it is suffering from others. Any discussion of *its sins* will be heard as belittling the harsh world in which they live.”

One of the reasons Jesus is the unexpected Messiah in Matthew is because Jewish society had allowed their current circumstances to define what their greatest issue is society is and, therefore, they redefined what salvation is.

And in the 21st century we do the same, we allow current social or political movements to redefine sin and salvation. For example, the Social Justice Gospel defines sin as something others do to you, that you are a victim of sin, and that Jesus came to fight social justice issues and repair the hurt you feel.

That’s not Jesus’ mission in Matthew 1:21. Jesus came to save his people from their sin. Notice to high modality of the wording: he “will” do it – not “he will try” or “he will open the way”, no “he will” do it. The greatest problem with the world is not Roman emperors, paranoid rulers, climate change, systematic racism, the LGBTQI influence in our schools. No, it’s far more personal. It is our sinful desires, our nature that is in rebellion to God. This is what the messiah came to save his people from. Paul understood this and makes it clear in 1 Timothy 1:15 **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”**

But how are we to react to him?

3) Going Public

Like I said at the start, most Christmas stories today present the world as ready to welcome in this saviour who will bring peace to the world. But now in the chapter 2 the public are first exposed to the presence of this Messiah and rather than go through each verse, I want to look at each person or group's reaction to Jesus.

a) The Religious Rulers: This one is subtle but if you have a group of foreign advisors tell you of a sign from your scriptures that the Messiah has been born, wouldn't you at least check it out? But you notice the chief priests and scribes, who know the prophecies about the Messiah, don't follow or show any interest in the Messiah – not a baby called Jesus from 2 peasants from Nazareth. Why this disinterest?

Last year we studied Ezra and what happens in Israel from the time after Ezra onwards in Israel is that the hope for a Davidic ruler slowly fades from the religious institutions because the High Priest and religious leaders are given more and more civic powers. So, by the late 1st century B.C, the chief priests and scribes don't really want a Davidic Messiah because it will mean they lose their power over Judea.

And again, throughout Matthew you see this indifference toward Jesus progress to outright hostility by the end of the gospel. The seeds of tension are sown early in the gospel.

b) Herod: Herod the Great dies in 4 B.C and by Matthew 2 he is in the last few years of his life. He was an insecure and paranoid leader. Augustus calls his census in 8 BC, Herod kills 2 of his sons in 7 BC and more in 4 BC, and Jesus is born probably 6/5 BC. So, Matthew 2 is completely in line with his character.

For Herod, Jesus is a threat to his power and must be removed at all costs. Each time we meet a government leader (like Pilate or Herod Agrippa) in Matthew they are unnerved by Jesus and want to stamp out his influence and power. And again, in the 21st century we have governments doing the same thing. In 2023 Israel wanted to ban Christian evangelism. Last year NSW passed laws against conversing with LGBTQ people that might lead them to question their lifestyle. Behind the current social and political reasons there is the deeper reason of trying to control Jesus' influence. We still live in a world that isn't receptive to a Messiah that is here to save us from our sin.

c) The Magi: It is no coincidence, given what we saw from the genealogy, that the group that react appropriately are the least likely to – the foreigners. The Magi were either from Persia ("Magi" is a Persian term) or Nabataea (where Herod's mother was from and where frankincense and myrrh was traded from), and they show the right posture to Jesus. They worship. **V: 11 "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."**

So, again throughout Matthew it is the least likely who the Messiah draws to himself – most obviously Matthew himself. Matthew is a tax collector, hated by most in that society, yet called by Jesus to follow him.

So, the Christmas story in Matthew isn't there to spread Christmas spirit or talk about good will for mankind – it is to reveal to those who can see it this unexpected Messiah. A messiah who came for the least likely of people to save them from the one thing that separates them from God.

Pray

Song – God is for us <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPZnFLhltzQ>

1. We won't fear the battle, we won't fear the night
We will walk the valley with You by our side
You will go before us, You will lead the way
We have found a refuge, only You can save

Chorus

Sing with joy now, our God is for us
The Father's love is a strong and mighty fortress
Raise your voice now, no love is greater
Who can stand against us if our God is for us

2. Even when I stumble, even when I fall
Even when I turn back, still Your love is sure
You will not abandon, You will not forsake
You will cheer me onward with never-ending grace

Chorus

Bridge

Neither height nor depth can separate us
Hell and death will not defeat us
He who gave His son to free us
Holds me in His love

Repeat Bridge

Chorus x2

Closing. *“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” (Matthew 2:6)*