



Miriam the Lord's Servant

Sermon for December 5, 2021
Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 1:26-38

Before we begin, I want you to know about the tablets for translation.
David or Noliani can help you right now if you are having trouble.
Raise your hands, please.
Or just get up and go see them.
As I preach, I will read my sermon and click through each sentence.
The words I say in English appear on the tablets in 12 different languages, whatever you choose.
I hope this is a blessing to you.

Sermon Introduction

For today's sermon, we are going to look at two passages of scripture about the birth of Jesus.
We will look at Luke chapter 1, to see what the angel Gabriel said to Mary.
But first, I want to read to you from Matthew chapter 1.
It is a list of 45 ancestors of Jesus.
We call lists like this a genealogy.
Matthew gives his readers this list to show that Jesus was a descendant of King David.
That's important, because many Old Testament prophecies spoke about a descendant of David who would fulfill God's promises for his people.

There are also some surprising names in this list.
I'm going to read it now.
It is long, with names that are hard to pronounce.
But everything in God's Word is important.
So now please open your ears and your hearts to God's Word.

Matthew 1:1-17

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his

brothers,

3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram,

4 and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon,

5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,

6 and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,

7 and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,

8 and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah,

9 and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

10 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah,

11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,

14 and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,

15 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,

16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

17 All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Please pray with me.

Father in Heaven, when we read the Christmas story we are amazed by the humility of your Son.

We see the radical love of our Savior, who entered into weakness to rescue us from our sin and shame.

Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to show us more of Jesus today.

We pray in his name.

Amen.

Here is the main point, or big idea, of today's sermon.

Big Idea: God uses broken people to do great things

As you saw in the passage I read, Jesus is a descendant of King David.
Jesus is also a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
God promised Abraham that he would have descendants from every tribe, language, and nation.
And Jesus came to fulfill that promise.
The birth of Jesus launched a global expansion of the people of God beyond Israel.

But the most surprising thing in Matthew's list is the women who appear in it.
A Jewish genealogy would normally include men, and only men.
However, there are five women in Matthew's list.
Miriam, of course, the mother of Jesus.
We call her Mary in English, but her name was pronounced Miriam 2,000 years ago.
Miriam is a highly honored and respected woman.
We will talk more about her in a few minutes.
The other four women are surprising because they do not polish the reputation of Jesus.

Usually, people point to their ancestors to make themselves look good.
In this chart, you can see that the first emperor of Japan was supposedly a descendent of the gods.
The Japanese people say that the emperor's great-grandmother was Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun.
That's why the Japanese flag has a sun on it, to honor Amaterasu.
The emperors in Japan claimed honor and legitimacy by showing they were descendants of Amaterasu the sun goddess.

Jesus, on the other hand, is a descendant of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.
Let me tell you why this is surprising.
Tamar's first husband died before she had children.
She was treated badly by her second husband, and also by her father-in-law.
She finally got pregnant through deception, by pretending to be a prostitute.
If you read her story you will see how she was mistreated and why she did something like that.

Rahab was a prostitute in the city of Jericho.
But she came to faith in the one true God, and helped God's people.
Rahab was a woman with a bad past, who became a hero.
Bathsheba was the mother of King Solomon, but she got pregnant through sin and scandal.
David took Bathsheba and committed adultery with her.
Then David murdered her husband Uriah.

Ruth does not have a shameful story, but she did have a difficult story.
She was a widow, and she was from Moab.
Matthew's genealogy reminds us that King David, the greatest king in Israel's history, had a Gentile

grandmother.

In fact, none of these women were Jewish.

Bathsheba might have been Jewish, but by marrying Uriah the Hittite she legally became a Gentile.

So why does Matthew include these four women in the genealogy of Jesus the Son of God?

Matthew could have included the most-respected women from the Old Testament, like Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel.

They were the wives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Why aren't they included in Matthew's list, instead of four Gentiles with troubled stories?

And why did Matthew include kings like Manasseh, the most wicked king in Jewish history?

Because Jesus did not come for perfect people with perfect stories.

The angel Gabriel told this to Joseph in Matthew 1:21.

"And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

The name Jesus, or Yeshua, means "Yahweh saves."

It doesn't mean "Yahweh helps people who are mostly okay."

Yeshua doesn't mean "Yahweh blesses the good people."

Yeshua means "Yahweh saves bad people who sin, because they cannot save themselves."

God the Father could have sent the Holy Spirit to make a wealthy princess pregnant with the Son of God.

Jesus could have chosen any woman on earth as his mother.

He could have been born in a palace or a castle.

Instead, Jesus was born to a poor, unmarried teenage girl, in a borrowed stable next to farm animals.

Jesus wanted to be born this way.

Jesus started his life on earth surrounded by questions about his background.

And Jesus died on a cross, the most shameful death the Romans could invent.

The shameful stories of the men and women in the genealogy of Jesus is a reminder to us that Jesus died for people like us.

I have a shameful past.

My story has parts I want to hide and forget.

You do, too.

Jesus isn't afraid of your story.

Jesus does not reject you because of your shame.

Instead, your shame is the reason he came to earth.

Erasing our shame was the reason he died.

Listen to what we find in Hebrews 12:2.

"look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Jesus hates shame.

Jesus died to kill the shame you and I carry around.

Hebrews 12:2 also says that Jesus "endured the cross" because of "the joy that was set before him."

Do you know what that joy was?

Do you know what joy could be powerful enough to keep Jesus on the cross?

Jesus endured the cross and died willingly.

Why?

Because you are "the joy that was set before him."

That's right.

You, even with your difficult past and your shame and sin.

Yes, you were the joy in the mind of Jesus when he was on the cross.

It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus on the cross.

It was his love for you.

His commitment to wash away your sin and shame.

Then, after he saves you, Jesus begins to write new chapters in our difficult stories.

New chapters that bring him great glory because his light shines brightest in dark places.

One author said this, "God's way is often a detour through which His promise is nevertheless fulfilled."
(E.Lohmeyer)

We should not be surprised to find detours and shameful stories in the genealogy of Jesus.

No one in that list had a "normal story."

There are no "normal stories."

We all have brokenness and detours in our lives.

Therefore, we should not be surprised that Jesus was born in abnormal circumstances.

It's an important part of the salvation story.

God could have chosen a different woman to be the mother of Jesus.

Someone who was married, or wealthy, or important.

But if Jesus was born without scandal and shame, then we who carry shame might be afraid to come to Him.

There is shame and scandal at the beginning and the end of the life of Jesus.

And that makes him a sympathetic and effective Savior for all of us.

Now let's look at the first chapter of Luke's gospel, starting in verse 26.

Luke 1:26-27

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee,

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to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.

Elizabeth is the older cousin of Miriam.

Elizabeth is much older.

She could not have children anymore.

But God did a miracle in her life and gave her a son who was John the Baptist.

Verse 27 tells us that Miriam (or Mary) was a virgin.

She was engaged to Joseph, but they were not married yet.

And Joseph is a descendant of King David.

We saw that in the genealogy of Jesus a few minutes ago.

Now let's read what Gabriel said to Miriam.

Luke 1:28-33

28 Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

29 Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

30 "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God!

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.

32 He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.

33 And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Wow.

I can understand why Miriam was confused and disturbed.

Seeing an angel would be a big surprise, right?

Also, Gabriel says Miriam is a favored woman.

"The Lord is with you!" Mary knows she isn't special.

Why is this angel speaking to her with such honor?

Because God chose her for a very great purpose.

Miriam receives favor and honor from God.

But Miriam is not sinless.

Listen to Romans 3:10-12

10 As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous--not even one.

11 No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God.

12 All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one."

Miriam is not perfect.

But the perfect, sinless, Son of God chose to live in her womb for nine months.

Miriam was a good woman.

But she's not a saint.

Gabriel does not call Miriam "great."

He calls her "favored woman" because Jesus the great Son of God has chosen her to be his mother.

When we read this story, our focus should be on God who uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

If you see this on the table downstairs at dinner one week, will you say: "Wow, what a beautiful plate!"

No.

The plate is there to carry the special food.

In a similar way, Gabriel wants us to focus on Jesus who is "very great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

God will give him David's throne, and Jesus will rule as King of the world forever.

Miriam was certainly stunned by hearing all this.

I imagine the words about Jesus being great and being king was confusing to her.

But maybe the most-confusing part was what Gabriel said about her having a baby.

Any baby, even a normal human baby, would be impossible for her.

Let's look at how Miriam responds to Gabriel's words.

Luke 1:34-38

34 Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

35 The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.

36 What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month.

37 For the word of God will never fail."

Miriam asks a very reasonable question in verse 34.

She does not say, "I don't believe you."

Miriam asks, "how can this happen?"

She doesn't understand, so she asks for more information.

Gabriel tells her that the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, will come upon her and overshadow her.

We don't know exactly how the Holy Spirit did this.

Maybe you find it hard to believe that God could do this.

But remember that God made Adam out of dirt from the ground.

The Holy Spirit came upon the dirt, and Adam came to life.

If God can do that, making Miriam pregnant is not difficult.

Verse 37 says "For the word of God will never fail."

That reminds us of what the Lord said to Sarah and Abraham.

God promised in Genesis 18 that Sarah would have a baby.

But Sarah was almost 100 years old and had never been pregnant.

God told her: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

God and Gabriel do not explain to Sarah and Miriam exactly how these miraculous pregnancies will happen.

God does not ask us to understand his ways.

He asks us to trust his word.

My friends, how do you respond when God calls you to do something you don't understand?

What if God leads you to do something that will be really hard?

Something people will criticize you for.

It's hard to trust God when you need to do something that is embarrassing, difficult, and confusing.

Look at Luke 1:38

38 Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

I am amazed by Mary's humility, faith, and trust in God's message.

Maybe you have heard this story so many times that it doesn't impress you anymore.

But think about this: Mary had no way to prove God's message to her.

Gabriel didn't announce to the entire town of Nazareth what was happening.

Mary didn't have a video of Gabriel's announcement that she could post on Facebook to show everyone.

Mary was a pregnant teenager in a small town.

Do you think the neighbors of Mary and Joseph believed their story?

Did their neighbors really believe that Mary was a pregnant virgin?

God chose Mary to do something very special.

But it wasn't easy.

Life got even harder for Mary as her belly grew and people started talking behind her back. But remember this: When God calls you to do something difficult, he also promises to be with you in the difficulty.

Many times in the Bible God tells his people to have courage because He is with them.

Listen to Deuteronomy 31:6.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

My friends, Mary is an example to us of someone who trusted the Lord even when God's message and mission were confusing and difficult.

But don't walk out of here amazed by Mary.

Be amazed at the mercy and greatness of God.

Be encouraged that God will not leave you or forsake you.

Only God can give an ordinary woman like Mary, and ordinary people like you and me, the courage and faith to do extraordinary things.

Let's pray together now to Jesus, the hero of our stories and Savior of our souls.

Jesus, you are very great.

You are Son of the Most High.

Thank you for your incredible humility and love.

You chose to be born as a helpless baby.

You allowed all of your greatness to be poured into weakness.

You left the glory and security of heaven to enter a world of cruelty and death.

These facts give us hope, because we helpless, we are weak, we are cruel and full of sin.

We need you to pour your holiness and goodness into us, to make us new people.

Please do this for our good and your glory.

We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.