

## SERMON December 22, 2019

*<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.--*

***Matthew 1:18***

There is no doubt about it. Strictly speaking, we are all mongrels. I am not using the word *mongrel* in an abusive way. There are some folk who like to project themselves as people with a noble or pure blood line: *Mayflower* Descendents, Sons or Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of the Confederacy, White American. Scots, Scotch-Irish, Jew or German, what have you!

If any of you entertain that pretension, then you may sleep uneasily. You see, it all depends on which side of your family tree you choose to claim, and how far back or how wide you choose to go. We can be sly in choosing an honorable blood line. Go back a little further, though, go a little wider, and we soon discover that we are all *mongrels*. Forget the pretensions.

Matthew and Luke are the only two Gospels that speak about the birth of our Christ. They totally agree on only two key matters—Jesus was conceived out of wedlock; and the pregnancy was the *gift* of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew precedes his account with the family tree of Jesus. This holds two surprises. First, it is the family tree of Joseph, not Mary. In Judaism, it is the maternal bloodline that determines whether you're a Jew. Jesus is listed in the blood line of Joseph. That seems strange, especially if Joseph is not the father of this child.

Secondly, the family tree deliberately includes some questionable characters. It's almost as if Matthew is insisting on the mongrel nature of this child. He lists the names of some women of dubious character and ethnicity. In doing this, Matthew is magnificent in his grasp of the true *meaning* of Christ Jesus! Matthew breaks with convention and deliberately includes females in the genealogy. And what females they are! Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and a fifth unnamed woman. Women were outsiders in the misogynist Hebrew society of the day. Women were possessions, mere chattel, to be at the service of men like a donkey or a camel, and disposed of, whenever a man saw fit.

What is more, four of the women whom Matthew mentions are involved in scandal. Three of them were not even Jews. Tamar had twins by her father-in-law. Rahab was a Caananite prostitute who assisted Joshua at Jericho. Ruth was a pagan Moabite, who brought herself to the notice of a prospective husband by sneaking in and sleeping at the foot of his bed. Bathsheba, the wife of a Hittite soldier, was seduced and made pregnant by king David.

Matthew goes out of his way to sully the family tree! There were plenty of respectable women in that family who could have been mentioned by Matthew. But no, he deliberately opts for the disreputable, and includes them in the genealogy before announcing: *“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.”*

Matthew is making what could be a creedal statement with profound social implications. In effect, he is saying to the world: “Outsiders are in!” The one true Messiah is God’s holy *mongrel*! What happened when Mary conceived out of wedlock and gave birth was God’s doing; *“...she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.”* This event covers us all— all humanity! Especially all those outsiders...and the lost.

The unexpected, unwarranted, immeasurable grace of God does not focus on the respectable and the well-bred, not on the powerful and the well-to-do. It embraces the meek and the poor, the misunderstood and the abused, the disreputable and the disenfranchised. God’s Holy Mongrel, though, is *Immanuel*, God-with-us, God for us...whoever we are.

This is the true Gospel as Matthew presents it. Please, my friends, never let go of this Good News. No matter what your family or social background, no matter what your race or your culture, no matter what your education or your upbringing, no matter whether we have sinned in little matters or sinned in major, disgusting ways, Jesus was conceived and born to include us, to gather us into the warm embrace of God. The *God of Christmas* will stop at nothing to redeem the people of planet Earth.

The Incarnation happened for you...and for me. God’s most beautiful, matchless Holy Mongrel has come among us, full of truth and grace. *Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.*

Earlier I spoke about the *four* Old Testament women who are mentioned in the family tree of Jesus—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. What about the *fifth* woman mentioned? She is, of course, Mary. Mary was most likely a simple country girl, maybe no more than 14 to 16 years old. She had no power, no special wealth or fame, and is not described as having any special physical beauty. Mary was just another example of the many *nobodies* who loved God with a simple yet profound faith, a faith gutsy enough to show amazing courage for her God. As a pregnant teenager she would have had to endure gossip. She would have been the subject of smutty jokes by the men, suffered being smirked at by other “good and chaste” young girls, and scorned by the virtuous women of the town. The rumor spread, persisted, and was later found in non-Christian texts—that Mary slept with a Roman soldier, his name supposedly was Panthera—“the Panther;” making her child, then, a Gentile bastard.

Yet this *fifth* woman in Jesus’ family tree accepted her unexpected pregnancy, and her calling to be the mother of a suffering Messiah with tremendous courage. She saw her baby as the gift of the Holy Spirit, to be cherished and nurtured for the greater glory of God. Her kid might be seen by many as a mongrel, but her child was *God’s Holy Mongrel*. Her nurture, both physical and emotional, and her spiritual teaching and example would shape the Savior Christ. No matter which way you look at it, Mary stands as one of the most remarkable human beings that has ever walked this planet.

Hail, Mary, favored by God, the Lord is with *you!* *And you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.* That name, Jesus, or Joshua (meaning a liberator) includes us all. He became one of us, another mongrel in the human race of mongrels. Yet he displayed a love and a loveliness of spirit surpassing all others, so that each person might inherit a kingdom prepared for them before the beginning of the universe. It was all God’s doing—this Jesus-thing. *Immanuel* God with us.

I am glad to be a mongrel with the blood of Alsatian refugees from the Rhineland *via* Romania, Hungarian irredentists from the foothills of the Carpathians in Slovakia and some other distant forebears in my veins; but I am ever more so glad to be a follower of that *Holy Mongrel*, Jesus Christ.

This is truly the most wonderful Holy Spirit-event possible! It includes us all—***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—SURPRISE!—she was **found to be pregnant** through the Holy Spirit.*