**SERMON SERIES: THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS NEAR**

 **“Royal Blood”**

*Matthew 1:16, 18-21*

Today we continue our Advent sermon series “The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Near,” as we prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus. The kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven, was the central image in Christ’s teachings throughout the gospels. Last Sunday we talked about the role John the Baptist played. He was very much like one of the Old Testament prophets who called the people to turn back to God. John was the one sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He laid the foundation and made sure everything was ready to receive the Messiah.

We began this series two weeks ago by looking at the covenant God established with King David in the Old Testament. It was a covenant, or binding contract, that David’s legacy would never fade, and that someone from David’s line would rule as king forever. This morning we’re going to see how God fulfilled that covenant through a poor carpenter whose family history included a very significant figure: King David himself! Let’s turn to our Scripture reading, Matthew 1:16, 18-21.

***Genealogy is the study of families and of tracing their roots and lineages. The pursuit of family history tends to be shaped by several motivations, including the desire to carve out a place for one's family in the larger historical picture, and a sense of responsibility to preserve the past for future generations. Historically, in Western societies the focus of genealogy was on kinship and the descent of rulers and nobles, often arguing or demonstrating the legitimacy of claims to wealth and power. In Eastern societies, the focus of genealogy also dealt with claims to status or power; but they also centered on family honor and a sense of connection with their ancestors.***

***A few years ago I received a trial membership to a genealogical web site, so I thought I’d try and trace my grandfather’s family history. His last name was Hunter so I knew his ancestors originated in Scotland. However, I only got as far back as the Civil War before the trail dried up. I realized that it was going to take more time and resources than I had in order to follow my grandfather’s name back to its origins.***

***Amateur and professional genealogists often uncover amazing things as they research family names and histories. Facts come to light that someone in the family line was a murderer; someone else served in battle; another married under some scandalous circumstance; one served in the courts of royalty; others were instrumental in establishing churches, schools, or hospitals. Shelia has done some pretty extensive genealogical research into her past, discovering that one of her ancestors—her ninth great-grandmother—was tried for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts! Such discoveries add depth and new chapters into a family’s story—or skeletons for the family closet!***

While reading through the gospel of Matthew I made one such discovery. It’s a very simple thing, but one which reinforces the covenant God made with King David: *16Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.*

Now let’s be honest: most of us skip over the first fifteen verses of Matthew’s gospel when we read it. It’s the genealogy of Jesus and we tire very quickly of who-was-the-father-of-who, or as the King James Version says it, *“And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; and Azor begat Sadoc…”* ***I remember one Christmas Eve in my first*** ***appointment the senior pastor’s message was based out of*** ***Matthew 1. I was the Scripture reader so I had to read every*** ***name in that genealogy! I jokingly told him afterward that*** ***next year* he *could read the Scripture and I would deliver the*** ***message!***

But the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 is important because it established the history and lineage that Jesus was part of. For Matthew, writing to a predominately Jewish-background church, it was critical to establish the family credentials of Jesus. The people of that time in history took great pride in their family history and honor—just people in Middle Eastern and Far Eastern lands still do to this day.

So we’re told *Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.* Notice it doesn’t say that Joseph was the father of Jesus, as all the other relationships do in chapter one. We’re simply told that Mary gave birth to Jesus. For Matthew’s first-century listeners and readers, that would’ve been an eyebrow-raiser!

But as we read further, Matthew’s surprising introduction to Jesus took another amazing step. Verses 18-21 tell us *18This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. 19Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. 20As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* ***Okay, we might ask, “What’s so amazing about that?” Sure, it’s a story we hear every year at this time; we know it by heart.*** But remember I said I discovered something I’d never seen before, but which had always been there. It was simply this: *As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said…*

Did you hear it? What did the angel say to the poor carpenter? *“Joseph, son of David.”* We’ve already been told in verse 16 that *Jacob was the father of Joseph.* Why would Matthew not report the angel saying “Joseph, son of Jacob”? After all, that would have been the correct genealogical protocol: Joseph, who was the son of Jacob, who was the son of Matthan, and so on.

Instead, Matthew broke with genealogical protocol to say that Joseph was the son of David—because as we have seen, it was through the line of King David that God had promised a ruler, one who would sit in David’s royal place for all eternity.

Matthew wants us to know without a doubt that this Jesus, this Messiah, was of pure royal blood. He might have been living in poverty out in the sticks of Judea, but he was nevertheless the one true, right and eternal king whom God had promised to David, confirmed through the prophet Isaiah, and heralded by John the Baptist.

Of course, that wasn’t the Messiah the people of Israel were looking for and anticipating. For those who remembered the covenant, or who hadn’t given up on waiting for the coming of the Messiah, they thought he would be a great and powerful king--a warrior, someone who would be just like his ancestor David—and who would restore Israel to her former place of glory and prestige among the nations.

This was plainly evident in the people who were made aware of the birth of Christ: lowly shepherds; scholars from a far off land; a carpenter and his young bride. The religious elite in Jerusalem couldn’t imagine that the Messiah would come in any way other than on a war horse with sword in hand to overthrow Rome. The scholars who studied the Old Testament prophecies never imagined that God’s promised deliverance would be through a child.

Each of us have images and ideas of who and what Jesus should be. Some today still want a military leader who will fulfill their patriotic and nationalistic enthusiasm. Some want a Messiah who demands nothing from them. Others want a Christ who remains a little baby, snug in a manger, easy to handle.

But we’re not given the Messiah we want, but rather the Messiah God knows we need. ***Recently Felicia and I*** ***watched “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy again. My favorite*** ***character in that story is Aragorn. He wrestles with his*** ***destiny throughout the course of the epic tale of good vs. evil. Aragorn is descended from the line of kings that once defeated*** ***the evil Sauron, but there has been no king since then. Aragorn*** ***doesn’t match what many expect from a king, therefore they*** ***don’t recognize him as the one true king who can reunite a*** ***divided land and bring peace.***

Matthew makes it very obvious that Jesus was a member of the house and line of David. And as such, he *is* the one true king who can reunite a divided creation and bring peace to all who will embrace him.

The question we each must answer in the next few days is this: Am I willing to embrace Jesus Christ the way he is, with what he offers, obedient to his will alone? Or like the majority in Israel at the time of his birth, will I ignore this Messiah because he doesn’t meet my criteria and expectations? In our time of response, may God speak plainly and convincingly to us, and may our replies be true and honest.

Let us pray: *Loving God, Advent reminds us that you don’t do things like we think you should. Instead of a clone of King David, armed for battle and ready to destroy Israel’s oppressors, you willingly became an infant. You humbled yourself on our account, when we didn’t deserve it, and ushered in a kingdom that gave us a home. You fulfilled your part of David’s covenant, setting a descendant of David--your Son Jesus Christ--as king over all things. During this Advent season, help us see where our expectations of the Messiah are at odds with who Jesus truly is. Forgive us when we only want a certain kind of deliverer, a certain type of Messiah, a specific image that we expect you to fulfill. Help us to see that you don’t fit our preconceived notions and never will. Through your Holy Spirit, open us to the truths and realities of our one true king—a king whom we cannot tame, bargain with, or overthrow. Help us to humble ourselves in every part of our lives, and to welcome your arrival as the magnificent, mysterious and dangerous thing it is, for the kingdom of heaven draws ever closer. Amen.*