

# The first thing to say about Jesus is...

## Matthew 1

When everyone's waiting for Christmas to come, there's two kinds of people. There's the patient, trusting, happy-to-wait-ers. Christmas will come when it comes, and they trust that they are going to receive good things. Then there's the not-so-patient, restless, wondering-if-it's-going-to-be-as-good-as-they-hope-ers. Never quite sure if their loved ones are going to get quite the right presents or the day is going to be the way they hope it is.

Me, I'm a happy-to-wait-er. But I wasn't always. Last week, Colin encouraged you to ask for the Star Wars films for your Christmas - the classic original trilogy, episodes 4-6. Well, when I was 15, that's what I asked my parents for. I knew that it was a reasonable present to ask for and they had a good track record of fulfilling the promise of Christmas Day expectations.

But then I got nervous. 'Did they get that I want all *three* films - not just the first one? Will they get the 20th anniversary digitally remastered DVD boxset with deleted scenes? Can I really trust that they're going to come through on this?' So... (those of you who know my parents, they don't know this story, so don't tell them, right?) - I went hunting round the house. Just to *check*...

I went searching around cupboards and shelves whilst they were downstairs. And in the back corner of a bedroom closet, about two weeks before Christmas, there it was. It was all in good order. DVD trilogy boxset, check. 20th anniversary edition, check. Everything that I was hoping for in the promise of Christmas that year, check.

So Christmas Day came, and I opened up this box shaped present, thanked my parents for giving me exactly what I'd hoped for, and feigned a smile to suggest that was the first time I'd known it. Of course, the two things I hadn't banked on were that nagging guilty feeling that I hadn't trusted in the waiting. And that they ended up giving me more than I'd hoped for with some extra things they gave that I never realised I'd needed.

Colin also spoke to us last week about what the gospel writer John decided was the first thing to say about Jesus - that He is the eternal God in action in this world - bringing light-life to those who walk in darkness and are ready to receive that light-life from God Himself.

This week, I'm sharing with you what the gospel writer Matthew wants to tell us is the first thing to say about Jesus, and it's this: *Jesus is God keeping His promises.*

If you don't know much about the God of the Bible that we keep saying brings us an infinitely fuller life, or if you've got trust issues with this God, or if you're someone who's pretty restless in the walking and waiting of life, then Matthew 1 has got something special and foundational to say to you about God and His gift of Jesus Christ. Before we get into that...

*In your family, who's not good at waiting for the 'promise' of Christmas Day?*

Jesus is God keeping His promises. vv.1-17 point us to God's promises spoken in Jesus' family tree. vv.18-25 point us to promises spoken in Jesus' names.

The very first thing Matthew tells us about Jesus is in v.1, of course. There, and in vv.17 and 18, he gives Jesus the title 'Christ' (or 'Messiah' in Hebrew). That's the promised One. The 'waited for' One. The One sent from God to His people to change their lives forever.

Matthew's showing us that the whole Old Testament story is pointing forwards to this person, Jesus Christ. He's the One God's people were waiting for like a child desperate for Christmas to come. The New Testament all points back to Him and what He did in His life, death and resurrection. Jesus is the centre of God's story, plan and promises to us.

In vv.1 and 17, Matthew shows us how he's framing Jesus' family tree. He splits it up into fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to Jesus. And in this way, Matthew is pointing his readers to how Jesus *keeps the promises* that God's people first saw and heard in Abraham, in David and amongst the exiles.

In v.2 Matthew takes us right back to Abraham. A father, who received this promise from God in Genesis 12:3 - 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed by you.' That's the Old Testament looking forward to a promise to be fulfilled.

Here's the New Testament pointing back to that promise being fulfilled in Christ, with Paul writing this in Galatians 3:7-9 - 'Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would

justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.’

The language in those passages is about a father and a family. Abraham is a father of faith. A father with children who belong to the family *through faith*. Faith in God’s rescue, faith in His promises, faith in belonging to Him. Abraham pointed to the fatherhood of God. And Matthew 1 is pointing us to Jesus being the fulfilment of the promise that by faith, God becomes our Father. When Jesus becomes the centre of your life, God adopts you as a child in His family, now and forever.

Then in v.6, Matthew highlights David. A king, who received this promise from God in 1 Kings 2:4 - ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne in Israel.’ That’s the Old Testament looking forward to a promise to be fulfilled.

Here’s the New Testament pointing back to that promise being fulfilled in Christ, with Peter preaching this in Acts 2:29-36 - ‘Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

‘Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’

The language in those passages is about a king and a kingdom. David is a king, ruling over people who belong to and bow to God. David pointed to the kingship of God. And Matthew 1 is pointing us to Jesus being the fulfilment of the promise that in bowing to Jesus, God becomes our King.

*How would it change you if you were daily aware of the presence of:*

*A Father loving and treasuring you*

*A King leading and commanding you*

Then in v.12, Matthew highlights the exiled community in Babylon. Those people who had rejected God’s fatherhood and kingship, and been rejected and punished by God for turning away from Him. People who heard the promises of God from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who said in Isaiah 52:7-8 - ‘How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good

news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"... When The LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.'

In the New Testament, the authors point us back to the many promises in the many prophesies of Isaiah, and others. In Luke 3:4-6, John the Baptist is preparing the way for the return of The LORD, rolling out the red carpet for God's coming - just as Isaiah foretold. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus says He is the One who has come to preach good news to the poor, to set the captives free, release the oppressed - quoting Isaiah.

The language of these Isaiah passages is about more than the coming of any old father or any old king. It's about God Himself, coming to be present with His people. *That's* the promise that Matthew is pointing to. That in the coming of this Jesus is the coming of a Father to be with the family who own His name, and a King to be with the people who bow to Him, and more than that, the coming of *God Himself* to rescue and release His people.

That's spelled out in the names given to the child born to Mary in vv.18-25. There are promises in those names. The promises of God, not just kept, but - to use Matthew's word, which he uses time and again in his book - *fulfilled*.

v.21: '...you are to give Him the name Jesus (which means, 'The Lord saves') - because He will save His people from their sins.' Jesus is the promised Rescuer.

I don't know if you feel like you need rescued from anything. People don't usually give Jesus a second thought until they do feel like that. What Matthew reminds us God promised was someone who would rescue His people from *their sins*. Forgiveness. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from that power that seems to have a hold on you and make you think and live in ugly ways. The promise of that is *fulfilled* in Jesus coming to us.

vv.22-23: 'All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel - which means, "God with us."'" Jesus is *God Himself* coming to be with us! This is not God sending us experts or advice or life coaching or therapy or peace for an hour and a half on a Sunday.

This is God coming Himself. To His people. To the ones who through faith are waiting on the promises of a Father, and a King, and a Rescuer - who want those things like my kids want December 25th to come today.

These are things that transform you and your destiny way more than any Christmas present, or any self-help book or professional referral. *God with us*. That changes *everything*. And it's not just for the residents of Bethlehem and Nazareth and Jerusalem 2000 years ago. *God with us* in Jesus, bringing us into a family and a kingdom and forgiveness and an infinitely fuller life - that's for all those following Jesus in every age.

Matthew finishes his book the way he starts it. In Matthew 1:23, we read that Jesus is 'God with us.' And in Matthew 28:20, the last verse of the book, even as Jesus physically departs to Heaven, He says to those who had made Him the centre of their lives, 'I am *with you*, my disciples, *always* - to the very end of the age.'

Father, King, God with us and rescuing us from sin. All the promises of these things, fulfilled in Jesus.

*How would it change you if you were daily aware of the presence of:  
A Rescuer freeing you from sin  
God Himself*

Matthew 1 says Jesus is God keeping His promises. So what? What does that have to do with your life? Your Christmas and what you celebrate about it? Your response to God?

I noticed in this chapter full of God's faithful promise keeping, it's full of other characters in Jesus' family tree who are more of a mixed bag. You've got promise breakers like Judah in v.3, who made a pledge to his daughter-in-law Tamar to look after her after her husband, his son, died. Then Judah broke that pledge. She resorted to seducing her father-in-law to secure her future. Their story is in Genesis 38.

And you've got promise breakers like David and Bathsheba, the adulterous couple whose unfaithfulness led to a man's death and a family's deep grief. Their story is in 2 Samuel 11-12. And you've got a whole list of promise breaking kings, starting with Solomon in 1 Kings 11 and pretty well most of the other kings listed after him - kings who promised wholehearted worship of God, and to lead their people that way, but who ended up mixing their worship with other idols (not unlike a lot of us today).

You've got a story of what *appears* to be promise breaking and unfaithfulness in vv.18-19. Joseph thinks Mary has broken her engagement pledge - she's

pregnant after all, and he knows for sure the baby's not his. Back then, you wouldn't just 'call off the engagement' - you'd have to formally divorce from this binding promise.

But you've also got stories of great promise keeping and faithfulness in the family tree. In v.5 there's Rahab the prostitute, who was bravely faithful about helping God's people scout out Jericho to work out how to defeat that city. And God's people were faithful in turn to their promise to keep Rahab and her family safe. Their story is in Joshua 2 and 6.

Also in v.5 are Ruth and Boaz - Ruth who faithfully kept her promise to her bereaved mother in law to stay with her no matter what, and Boaz who kept his promise to redeem and adopt this family and give them a new future.

You've also got a story of *actual* faithfulness in Mary and Joseph. Mary, who in Luke's gospel told God, 'I'll do it - I'll carry the child conceived by the Holy Spirit,' although she knew the stigma and danger and cost in that. Joseph, who believed God when He showed Joseph that what Mary was telling him was true, who married and cared for Mary, who got her into Bethlehem, out to Egypt, and all that she and the baby needed he provided.

I expect that you, like me and like all of us, have a mixed bag experience when it comes to other human beings and their promises. You've been hurt. You've been burned before. There's been great faithfulness from some - maybe friends, family, others - but great hurt and betrayal from others. You've been let down. And it's hard to trust promises. It's hard to take a leap of faith.

So when it comes to God, all of that mixed bag experience enters your thinking. You've become used to not jumping with two feet into trusting promises. But trusting promises is *exactly* what God calls human beings to do.

He tells us in His Word, 'I *promise* you my presence in your life... I *promise* you a relationship where I will never break my word... I *promise* you a place in my family... I *promise* you that it's going to be hard following me... but I *promise* you that it's going to be infinitely fuller too... I *promise* you forgiveness, if you'll accept that gift... I *promise* you a life beyond this one that is better by far... I *promise* you hope and a future and a new identity in me... I *promise* you light and life and grace and truth... I *promise* to fill you up the way that all the other things you've tried to fill up with can't'

God makes promises. And He does call on you to trust them. And the message of Matthew 1 to us broken, damaged, burned, hurting humans is *you can trust God. He keeps every promise in Jesus Christ. So jump.*

It's significant I think that a few of you have told me recently, 'You know what, it was way easier *before* I was a Christian. It's so much *harder* following Jesus than not following Him!' You're right. And Jesus told us that it would be like this. But He also promised that it's way better.

People want easy. But they end up with empty. Jesus promises it *will* be tough walking with Him. But He also promises to be right there with you. Leading you as King. Helping you as big brother. And filling you up now, and perfectly in eternity, in a way that the path-of-least-resistance godless suburbanites will never know

In Matthew 1, God says to those of you feeling like this, 'In Jesus Christ I keep my promises. Don't lose sight of what I'm giving you. My Fatherhood. My Kingship. My rescue from the power and guilt of sin. My very presence in your life.' Jesus doesn't just *keep* promises, He *full-fills* them. He's the only One who can full-fill.

There's another experience we feel that Matthew 1 speaks to. It's the waiting. The restless, anxious, is-it-ever-going-to-happen *waiting*. Like the advent itch, like the search for Star Wars DVDs in the cupboard, a doubtful distrusting leading to trying to put matters into your own control. Is actually going to deliver? Not on your expectations of Him - they can always be errant. But on what He's actually *promised*.

'Am I going to *know* I'm forgiven? Am I going to live forever? Is He coming back? It's been a while, frankly... Is the thing God showed me He is going to do actually going to happen. I know you're more patient than me, God, but come on! I think I might need to take the wheel again for a while, God, because the truth is, if I say it out loud - I don't *trust* you. I don't want to *wait* long enough to trust you.'

Matthew 1 reminds us of a long story. Of people waiting for hundreds of years. Through lengthy silence from God. Through their own sinful mistakes and missed turns. But Matthew says, Jesus fulfils the promise. Always, in the end, without fail.

And remember, the Christmas Day we're really heading for is going to bring this all together. The day that Christ returns to His creation, and eternity

unfolds. Every tear wiped dry, no more pain, no more death. As one person in the church put it so well this week, 'No more broken relationships, cancer or guilt.' The embrace of the Father, the majesty of the King, the celebration of the rescue completed. The forever presence of us with God, God with us.

That's better than a Star Wars trilogy DVD boxset. And worth waiting more patiently for too.