

Sermon 6th December 2020.

A couple of months ago our son went to the Isle of Skye with some friends for a few days. We didn't know it at the time but one of his friends had a drone, which we only discovered when a video was posted on his Facebook page. From the camera in the drone we were treated to some spectacular scenery and as it rose high in the sky you could begin to understand that part of the Western Isles and how the geography fitted together, because you were able to see for miles. You could make out all the contours of the land which is like a giant jigsaw as well as all the narrow, winding roads.

As we turn to Matthew Chapter one, it's as if we are being given a bird's eye view from a great vantage point so that we can see all the winding roads of history that lead to Jesus Christ.

All the twists and turns and at times what seems to be hair-pin bends – but they all lead to the same place and that is Jesus Christ.

Look at Matthew chapter one and verse one;

'A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.'

Then look at verse 17, **'Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.'**

By giving us this bird's eye view Matthew wants us to understand who Jesus is.

Just look at some of the landmarks he gives us. In verse 1 he is son of David and son of Abraham.

Son of David – in other words, he is of royal descent.

Son of Abraham – he is the son of the promise given to Abraham that God's desire was to bless all nations.

So, we can start to piece this jigsaw together. Who is Jesus? He is the son of David and the son of Abraham.

And if we turn to the end of Matthew's gospel, we can see how Jesus himself fits the whole jigsaw together.

Matthew 28 verse 18, **'Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'.**

That is Jesus the king – and he isn't just any king. All authority in heaven and on earth' has been given to him. He is the king of kings.

But he isn't only the son of David he is also the son of Abraham - look at verse 19, **'therefore, go and make disciples of all nations'**. He is the one who will bless all nations.

This is what Matthew is pointing out for us. Jesus is the king, son of David and he is the fulfilment of the promise to bless all nations, son of Abraham.

That's what Matthew chapter one is all about – all the winding roads of history have led to this moment of Jesus being born.

If you cast your eye down the genealogy you will see there were some perilous moments along the way – there's disobedience and rebellion and idolatry, and murder and wars and apostasy as well as some wonderful godly people.

Sometimes God brings about his purposes in spite of his people and sometimes in tandem with his people.

Of course, it matters how we respond to God but in the mystery and sovereignty of God his purposes will be fulfilled whether we respond in faith and obedience or whether we don't.

So, that is the big picture as we rise high above the mountains but then suddenly the camera focusses in on two people as we are taken down to ground level.

Verse 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.'

This is another perilous moment. Can you imagine it? A teenage pregnancy out of wedlock. For Mary and Joseph this would jeopardise their whole future and there would also be repercussions for their parents as well. This was a potential disaster for everyone.

Mary and Joseph would have to go through a painful divorce which would be conducted like a public trial with all the shame and scandal that went with it

Under Deuteronomic law, Mary could be stoned to death. And if Joseph was believed to be the father, he could also be stoned to death.

And so, verse 19 comes like a breath of fresh air. **'Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man, he did not want to expose her to public disgrace, so he had in mind to divorce her quietly.'**

Joseph was a wonderful man.

He was righteous, but he was righteous in two ways.

For Joseph, this wasn't just a betrayal of him, it was a betrayal of God and so the right thing to do was to get a divorce.

But he is also righteous towards Mary. He shows her wonderful mercy. He could have easily dragged her off to court and publicly humiliated her and to make sure that everyone knew that he was the innocent party, but he obviously cares deeply for Mary.

Joseph's response to this devastating news was to honour God and to protect Mary. Despite being deeply hurt himself, his main consideration is his concern for Mary.

I find his response deeply moving and challenging.

And then the angel of the Lord comes to Joseph and explains what's really going on – look at verses 20 - 21, **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. 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.”**

That is a staggering explanation although it is very familiar to us today.

According to the angel, the purpose of Jesus' life is to save his people from their sins.

As I said, I think we are very familiar with that.

But I think Matthew wants us to understand the message of the angel in a very particular way.

Let's read verses 22 – 23, **All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).**

These verses explain to us what it means for Jesus to save his people from their sins.

Matthew is saying that if Jesus saves us from our sins (which was the message of the angel) then it means that God can be with us.

Turn to 2 Kings Chapter 17 for a minute and I'm going to read verses 18 - 20, **'So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, and even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced. Therefore, the Lord rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence.'**

The result of God's people perpetually sinning was that they were sent into exile and thrust from God's presence. That's what the exile is, it is being removed from the presence of God.

But now, through Jesus, Matthew is telling us that this exile is over.

Because, as the angel said, Jesus will save his people from their sins, Matthew now makes the staggering claim that God can now be with us.

He will be called Immanuel meaning God with us.

We are no longer thrust from God's presence, but we are brought close to him and him to us.

And that's what Matthew wants us to see.

Go back to Matthew Chapter 1 and verse 17 and you will see the other great landmark that Matthew mentions from our high vantage point as we once again take to the skies in our drone.

Remember, we have already seen two:

1. Jesus is the son of David – royal descent.
2. Jesus is the son of Abraham – he fulfils the promise to bless all nations.

And the third landmark is the exile, **'there are fourteen generations from the Babylonian exile to the Christ.'**

Jesus brings an end to the exile.

That's how Matthew wants us to understand the message of the angel, who said that Jesus will save his people from their sins.

Because we have been saved from our sins, the implication of this according to Matthew, is that never again will we be thrust from the presence of God.

And once again, that's how Matthew concludes his gospel.

Let's return one final time to Matthew Chapter 28 verses 18 – 20.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (that's Jesus son of David). Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations (that's Jesus son of Abraham), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age (that's Jesus, Immanuel, who ushers in the end of the exile)."

In every twist and turn of your life and my life and in every hair-pin bend that we encounter – we can be assured that God is with us.

I don't know your circumstances just like you don't know mine, but whatever they are, God says he will be a constant presence in your life and in mine.