**ADVENT 316, GOOD NEWS, NOT GOOD ADVICE, MT. 1:1, 3, 5, 6, 16, 17-23, DEC. 11/22.**

 Last week we got into Tim Keller’s *Hidden Christmas* & considered how **the world’s secular celebration of Christmas coincides with & in many ways agrees with our Christian celebration**. There were a number of overlaps with the giving of gifts to those we’re close to & to the poor, of getting together with family & friends & enjoying food together. But we also noted that the emphasis on lights, while shared, has a considerably different significance. **We certainly enjoy the lights, but the centrepiece for the Christian is Jesus, who came as the light of the world**. “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness **a light has dawned**.”

While **the world sees itself as capable of producing its own light & improving the world by its own efforts, Christians understand that there is no light in us. We are completely dependent on receiving it as a gift of grace from the outside, from God. The light has dawned**, it didn’t burst forth from the earth or from within us. Getting back to the secular & the Christian celebration, **this is the point of great divide**, Tim Keller’s 1st point of the *Hidden Christmas*. It was apparent from the end of **Isaiah 8**, where people had been consulting mediums & scholars & just about anyone they believed could offer insight. **But people were locked in darkness. That is why Jesus had to come**.

In **chapter 9**, we talked about **Jesus as “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**”. **Every one of these titles belongs only to God**. **Yet unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given. Jesus, God, came** to earth in human form, **a gift, undeserved**, of grace. **But it has to be received (Jn. 1:12)**. What good is any gift if you leave it unopened? **Christmas means we are so lost, so unable to save ourselves, that nothing less than the death of the Son of God Himself could save us.** You can’t pull it off by living a moral & good life.

This morning I want to talk to you about **the Mothers and Fathers of Jesus**. **How many of you have made up a resume?** What do you usually include? And how do you try to present yourself—to look good or to look bad? Well, you may not even have noticed the early verses of Mt. 1 before, even though it’s part of the Christmas account—aren’t you glad we didn’t re-read the whole list! If you’re like most people, you probably wanted to skip right by them—you know, “**the begats**”. Lord, have mercy and move me along to some real action! But you’d be missing something very important by doing that. **Christmas isn’t simply about a birth, but about a *coming*. God had planned for the arrival of His Son before He even created the earth**.

Matthew begins: “**This is the genealogy of Jesus Christ.” And that grounds what Jesus Christ is & does in history. This is real. It all happened**. Here’s why that’s important. **Advice** is about what you should or must do. **News** is a report about what has already been done. **Advice** urges you to make something happen. **News** urges you to recognize that something has already happened and to respond to it.  **Advice** says it’s up to you to act. **News** says someone else has already acted. **Think about this in terms of an invading army**. The town under siege needs military advice—where the trenches & tanks should go for example. But if a great king has intercepted & defeated the invading army, the town doesn’t need advisors, it needs mess-engers. And **the messengers don’t say** “Here’s what you have to do.” **They do say** “I bring you glad tidings of great joy!” **Translated, that’s “Stop trying to save yourselves. The king has already saved you.” Something has been done & it changes everything.**

The Gospel is not just another moralizing story. **There is no moral to the story of the nativity**. **The Gospel narrative isn’t telling you what you should do but what God has done**. The **birth of Jesus into the world is good news**, a gospel announcement. **You don’t save yourself. God has come to save you. Every other religion, when they talk about salvation, gives it as advice**, as though salvation is something you have to struggle for, as though it comes only if you do…pray, obey, transform your consciousness. **Such leaders say**, “I’m here to show you the way to spiritual reality. **Do all this. That’s advice**. **Jesus Christ says**, “I am spiritual reality itself. You could never come up to me & so I had to come down to you.” **That’s news**.

**Christmas is just the beginning of the story of how God came to save us**. **Though we deserve to be out in the dark & cold**, that’s where Jesus was born. **On the cross He was thrown into the spiritual darkness so we** could be brought into the warmth & light of God’s presence. **Christianity is not a self-improvement course, though** that’s certainly a side benefit.

**Now back to the resume**. In Jesus’ day, resumes didn’t include education & work history; they included your genealogy. Matthew didn’t put the best stuff on Jesus’ resume, or try to make Him look good. **Women** were never mentioned in genealogies of that time. In Jesus’ genealogy **5** are named, among them Tamar, Rahab & Ruth. Rahab & Ruth were Gentiles; Tamar tricked her father-in-law into incest. Jesus came out of that dysfunctional family. Rahab was a prostitute. King David is mentioned as the father of Solomon, whose mother, Bathsheba, had been Uriah’s wife, but who David had murdered so that his affair with Bathsheba would not be uncovered, but it was. So **moral outsiders**—adulterers, adulteresses, incestuous relationships, prostitutes, murderers, racial outsiders are **all publicly acknowledged** as the ancestors of Jesus.

**Why** do that? Well it shows us that **people who are excluded by culture, excluded by respectable society & even excluded by the law of God can be brought into Jesus’ family**. **Jesus’ holiness & goodness cannot be contaminated by contact with us**—unlike the “uncleanness” that was so important for the Jews to avoid.

You may say, but Jesus did, after all, descend from the line of **King David**.” Glad you brought that up. David had all the world’s credentials: male, not female; Jew, not Gentile; royalty, not poor. **But in this genealogy we see David can only be in Jesus’ family by grace. His evil deeds were worse** than anything done by the women in this history. **It’s not that good people are in & bad people are out. Everyone is in only by the grace of Jesus Christ**. **It is only what Jesus has done for you that can give you standing before God.** There’s no one, not the greatest human being, who does not need the grace of Christ. And there’s no one, not the worst human being, who can fail to receive the grace of Christ if there is repentance & faith.

**In Christ**, prostitute & king, male & female, Jew & Gentile, 1 race or another, moral & immoral—**all sit down as equals. Equally sinful & lost, equally accepted & loved**. The grace of God is so pervasive that even the “begats” are dripping with the mercy of God.

**This genealogy goes back a long time**—to Abraham; actually it goes back to Gen. 3:15. You can’t judge God by your calendar. He may seem slow but He never forgets His promises. **Christmas means that God is working out His purposes**.

**Angels are all around the Christmas scene**. **These messengers appeared to the shep-herds & Mary, but also to Zechariah & here to Matthew**. Matthew doesn’t let us think of Jesus as simply a great teacher or an angel, but God Himself. He confirms that the human life growing in Mary is not from any human being but from the Father. Matthew quotes from **Is. 7:14**, “The virgin will conceive & give birth to a son & will call Him **Immanuel**—God with us.” Though **the Jews** were very familiar with this prophesy, they **didn’t take it literally. The promise was greater than imagined! Because Jews believed in a God who was both personal & infinite, every-thing in their world-view worked against the idea that a human being could be God. And yet**, Jesus Christ—by His life, His claims & His resurrection—convinced His closest Jewish followers that **He wasn’t just a prophet telling them how to find God, but God Himself come to find us**.

Now **we’ve known this but maybe haven’t really thought out its implications**. Some argue that **the supreme miracle of Christianity is** not the resurrection of Christ from the dead but **the incarnation**. The beginningless, all powerful creator of the universe took on a human nature without the loss of His deity, so that Jesus, the son of Joseph, was both fully divine & fully human. **Of all things Christianity proclaims, that’s the most staggering**. **If there is a God, & He’s become human, why would you find it incredible that He would do miracles, pay for the sins of the world, or rise from the dead?**

So, **if you grasp the claim that God is with us**, & don’t just have a loose understanding of who He is, **it will create a crisis in your life & it will revolutionize your life**. **It gives us the greatest possible hope, because** it means our world is not all there is. There is life & love after death, & evil & suffering will 1 day end. There’s also personal hope for you & me despite our endless failings.

**A God who was only holy** would not have come down to us in Jesus Christ. He would have simply demanded that we get our act together & be moral & holy enough to merit relationship with Him. **A God that was only all-accepting love** wouldn’t have needed to come to earth either. He would have just overlooked sin & evil & embraced us. **Neither of these Gods would have bothered with Christmas**.

**But our God is infinitely holy**, so our sin cannot be shrugged off. It had to be dealt with. **And He is infinitely loving**, knowing we could never climb up to Him, so He’s come down to us. **So Christmas means there is all the hope in the world**.

 **What makes this gift so precious is how it comes to us**. Love comes to us as a human child, a vulnerable presence who shares the vulnerability of us all. He’s the Dependent One, depending on the love of His own Father who sent Him here. So we can depend on Him & gain the gift of love that we could never achieve on our own. **Christmas shows you a god unlike the god** **of any other faith**. **The incarnation means** that God suffered and that Jesus triumphed through suffering. Have you been betrayed? Suffered? Destitute? Faced death? So has He! Christianity says God has been all the places you have been, including all the dark places. You can trust Him!

 **Immanuel—God with us. It would have been astonishing enough** if the Son of God had become human and simply lived temporarily with us, then left, leaving a set of teachings. But He camped with us, moved right into the neighbourhood, right in our faces, conversing, loving, relating, up close & personal. **Jesus moved heaven & earth to get near us**. What’s your response to get near Him? Tell others this great news; bring them on your journey of celebration!