



Matthew 1:1-17
Sing a Song for Christmas (vol. 2)
“Come Thoo Long Expected Jesus”

Rev. Brian North
November 30th, 2025

This morning we launch a new sermon series that will take us through Christmas Eve, titled “*Sing a Song for Christmas (vol. 2)*.” You may remember that a few summers ago *Top Gun: Maverick* came out—36 years after the original *Top Gun*. One of the longest gaps between a movie and its sequel.

Well, this series is our own “Volume 2,” the sequel to the original *Sing a Song for Christmas* series from 2013—my second Advent and Christmas Eve here at Rose Hill. Twelve years later, we continue. We’ll look at different passages and pair them with different Christmas hymns than we did the first time. I don’t want to bore you by repeating the exact same ones—even though less than half of you were here a dozen years ago, so maybe it wouldn’t matter anyway.

Today we’re starting with one of the most beloved Christmas passages—a passage many of you could recite and have seen acted out in pageants over the years. Let’s turn to Matthew 1:1–17. We’ll read the whole thing. This is God’s Word to you and me today... **Mt. 1:1-17**

In light of Thanksgiving last week, aren’t you thankful I’m the one pronouncing all those names? And all the people said, “Amen.”

We’ve all had times when we’ve waited for something that seemed to take forever: the last bell of the school day, Christmas break, moving out of Mom and Dad’s house—or waiting for *your* kids to move out of *yours*. Maybe you waited a long time to land your first “real” job. We all know the feeling of waiting.

But imagine waiting not for a few months or years—but for a couple thousand years. Obviously, no individual lives that long, but imagine generations of your family or your nation waiting century after century for God to fulfill a promise. That’s what we see in today’s passage. And whenever God gives a promise, it creates hope. Hope points forward—to what has not yet happened. No one hopes for something that’s already occurred.

And so the names that we read here are a reminder of the hope they had of the promise of God. It starts with Abraham and then continues on for the generations to come.

Before we continue in that theme of hope, I do want to take a few minutes and address the different genealogies of Jesus presented in Matthew and in Luke.

The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, are different — and that raises a fair question: Why are the names not the same? The answer lies in the fact that Matthew and Luke are showing us two different but complementary lines of descent, each making different theological and historical points.

Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph: not Jesus' biological father, but his earthly *legal* father. In Jewish culture, legal fatherhood carried full standing — adoption gave a child all the rights of a natural-born son. So, by tracing Joseph's ancestry, Matthew shows that Jesus is the legal heir to David's throne, descended through the royal line of Solomon.

He does it in three groups of 14 generations (probably because $2 \times 7 = 14$, and 7 is a significant Biblical number), correlating with three significant eras of Jewish history: Abraham to David, David to the exile, the exile to Joseph. And particularly in the third section leading up to Joseph, he doesn't list every person in the lineage. This was common in their day in tracing genealogy, to kind of gloss over some folks. Probably in a couple hundred years when my great-great-great-great-great-great grandkids recount their genealogy, I'll get skipped over. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience, and his focus is on proving that Jesus has the rightful legal claim to be Israel's Messiah-King because of Joseph's lineage, tied directly to King David and all the way to Abraham, the start of the Jewish faith.

Luke, however, is doing something different. Most scholars (and the early church) understood Luke to be tracing the genealogy of Mary, even though Joseph's name appears at the start of the list in Luke 3. But this is why it's confusing, because it looks like Joseph's lineage, but it's all different people

especially in the generations closest to him. So what’s going on? Well, in ancient genealogies, the son-in-law could be listed in place of the daughter because genealogies normally flowed through men. If Mary’s father was Heli, then Joseph becomes “the son of Heli” (Luke 3:23) by marriage, which is consistent with how ancient Jewish records worked. This means Luke is tracing Jesus’ *biological* descent — His true human ancestry through Mary. And significantly, Mary comes from a different branch of King David’s family, the line of David’s son Nathan while Joseph traces to David’s son, Solomon. So, Luke shows that Jesus is a biological descendant of David, truly one of us, and the promised Son of David by actual bloodline.

It can be summarized like this:

Matthew shows that Jesus has the legal right to be King through Joseph.

Luke shows that Jesus has the blood right to be King through Mary.

What each parent lacks, the other one covers.

And both lines go back to David, fulfilling God’s covenant promises. The two lists of the generations are also different because Matthew highlights Jesus as the Messiah of Israel by going back to Abraham, while Luke highlights Jesus as the Savior of all humanity by tracing the line all the way back to Adam. Taken together, the genealogies teach us that nothing about Jesus’ arrival was accidental. God guided history, family lines, and generations so that the Messiah would come exactly as He had promised — both legally and biologically the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, and the Savior of the world.

So, with that explanation of the two genealogies, what do we learn from this list that Matthew gives us? I would suggest to you that the main thing to take away from this list is that our hope rests not in circumstances or human plans, but in the promises of God. That’s the overarching thing to take away. Let me give a couple sub-points under this.

First, our hope begins with God’s unchanging promises. Scripture is filled with the promises of God. By some counts, there are as many as 7,000 promises of God in the Bible. A more conservative reading or understanding of what constitutes a promise might put the number at closer to 3,000. Either

way, there are a lot of them, though there's certainly some overlap in those as well.

But, as an example, here are a few:

1. God promises his presence – “I will never leave you nor forsake you” – Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5.
2. God promises Salvation through Christ – “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [Jesus] will be saved” – Romans 10:13.
3. God promises forgiveness – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive...” – 1 John 1:9.

It is because of promises like these, and literally thousands more, that we have hope. Not because of the economy, the president, the governor, the horoscope, the flip of a coin...God's promises give us hope.

The most pertinent promises at Christmas include God's promise that someone will be born who will “crush the serpent's head” as Genesis 3:15 puts it, which is a promise of destroying Satan and his work. Jesus fulfills that.

There's a promise of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son, and naming him “Immanuel” which means “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14). Jesus fulfills that, too.

There's a promise of a King in the kingly lineage of David, who will establish an everlasting kingdom and throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Jesus, as we see in today's verses, fulfills this. The list of promises fulfilled in Jesus, including more that pertain to his birth, and then still more about his character, mission, atoning work, a new covenant, eternal reign, and more are all given in the Old Testament, a few hundred years and more before his birth.

These promises gave hope to the Israelites for centuries and their fulfillment of them in Jesus give us hope for what is to come for us – both in this life, and on the other side of the grave because of the cross of Christ and the empty tomb.

Second, God works through unlikely people. This is most obvious with the four women who are listed: Tamar of Canaan, Rahab of Jericho, Ruth the Moabite, and the ex-wife of Uriah the Hittite who most of us know as Bathsheba, who married King David after Uriah's death. The inclusion of these women was unusual. In all the OT genealogies, which are dozens and dozens with hundreds and hundreds of names listed – only about 16 or 17 women are named.

But not only that, these aren't the women who would be considered the "matriarchs" of the Jewish faith and Israelite history. More substantial women probably would include Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel. Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel also had supernatural births which would have tied them to Mary. But no. In fact, maybe the most striking thing about the women in the genealogical record he names is that they are all Gentiles or married a Gentile – in other words, a non-Jew. For a religion that was very particular about bloodlines being kept in the faith, the inclusion of these women demonstrate that God's plan all along included Gentiles. Ancestors of King David and the mother of King Solomon, were Gentiles.

The point is that while Jesus has this legal claim to Kingship because of being raised by Joseph, Jesus is nonetheless the savior of the whole world. His ministry is not just for Jews, but for Gentiles as well. This is a significant theme in the rest of Matthew's gospel, and then a huge theme in Paul's ministry and in the book of Acts as well, and in Revelation. Really, throughout the New Testament.

But this inclusion of these four unlikely people in the genealogy of Joseph, Jesus' earthly adoptive father, gives us hope that the good news of Jesus is for you and me as well, and that God can even work through us no matter what our past may be. The reality is, every person that God works through is a sinner. But somehow we forget that sometimes and think therefore that our sin is too great for God to forgive, or we're too scarred for God to work through. Really, this is everyone's story. But the inclusion of these unexpected people are a particular reminder that the gospel is for you and

me, and God can work through us as well. What a message of hope. We all need that in our lives!

One of the great hymns that reinforces the message of hope that we have in Jesus, and his fulfillment of these promises, is “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”. It was written in 1744 by the English pastor and theologian, Charles Wesley as a poem, and the tune it’s usually sung to now was written by Rowland H. Pritchard in 1830. Wesley’s hymns were often written as theological teaching tools: they were intended to communicate key truths of Scripture in a memorable and emotionally engaging way.

This particular one expresses a longing for the Messiah, which reflects the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah, as represented in the genealogy that opens Matthew’s biography of Jesus. This theme of wating, and waiting in hope, aligns well with Advent, which is this season of hopeful anticipation of the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Yes, the birth happened 2,000 years ago, but it’s like an annual re-enactment of the hope in his birth, while reminding us of the hope that we have for the rest of life and life eternal because of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

So, as we end our service with this song of hope, may it cement in us the hope that we have in Jesus. We can imagine the people in Matthew’s genealogy – like Abraham, David, Ruth, Rahab – each waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled. They could only hope and trust God. And generations later, the Messiah finally comes in a humble town, in a humble birth, to a humble virgin named Mary, all in the fullness of God’s perfect timing. That’s the hope that we have in Jesus. And we still live by hope as we trust God and his perfect timing in our lives. So may these people, and this song, inspire us to live each day as people of hope in a world that desperately needs it.

The four women: The Gentile mission. Through four interracial marriages Matthew teaches us about missions and racial reconciliation (1:3, 5-6). While Matthew's most obvious point is the

connection of Jesus with Israel's history, another point would also strike his biblically sensitive readers forcefully. Genealogies need include only men (those in 1 Chron exemplify this pattern), so the unexpected appearance of four women draws attention to them. Had Matthew merely meant to evoke the history of Israel in a general way, one would have expected him to have named the matriarchs of Israel: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. Or to evoke supernatural births as a prelude to Mary's, he could cite Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, whose wombs God opened. Instead he names four women whose primary common link is their apparent Gentile ancestry: Tamar of Canaan, Rahab of Jericho, Ruth the Moabite and the ex-wife of Uriah the Hittite.

When Matthew cites these four women, he is reminding his readers that three ancestors of King David and the mother of King Solomon were Gentiles. Matthew thus declares that the Gentiles were never an afterthought in God's plan but had been part of his work in history from the beginning. This point fits an emphasis that runs throughout Matthew's Gospel (for example, 2:1; 3:9; 4:15; 8:11; 28:19), that God is not only for people of our own race or culture; we must cross racial and cultural boundaries to evangelize the whole world, humbly learn from other cultures, and serve with our brothers and sisters there.