

The Ultimate High Risk High Reward Investment

Unlikely Family Tree / Matthew 1; Matthew 1:18–25

Christmas Eve 2023

Recently I followed a link to watch a portion of a friend's worship service on Facebook. But a different video caught my eye. The image I was seeing was of a video game. In the upper left hand corner was a small image of the young man playing the game. You may have never heard of this and others of you likely have done this, but people watch other people play video games online. I don't know what this game was called, but the young man playing was guiding a young woman walking on thin rail the width of a balance beam and it appeared she was walking perhaps 10,000 feet above a city. Some of you know my fear of heights and though no human was in any actual physical danger, my hands began to sweat as if I was the one walking on the beam with no net high above the city. There was no actual risk involved unless it was the risk of wasting time because I can see how someone we get caught up looking at that. It was hard to turn away.

This Christmas we have looked at three women so far in Jesus's family tree. Matthew recorded in the beginning of his gospel the genealogy of Jesus beginning from Abraham through King David down to Joseph who was in that same ancestral line. But in this list of names of men, because it was listing fathers, five women are mentioned. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah, and Mary. Those names reveal to us the wonder of the mercy of God. Those names elevate the role of women in a time when women held no social status. And if their stories were in your family tree. I'm not sure you would lead with them. But God deliberately led Matthew to not just tell this story but tell it first. Matthew wrote to a primarily Jewish audience who would know the stories behind the names. But mostly we don't and so we have told their stories and thought about the significance that Jesus came to earth through these women. Most of them are Gentiles or were married to one. That shows that God always intended to welcome all ethnicities into his family. But the one thing they all have in common: Each were suspected of illegitimate sexual activity related to their childbearing. In some cases, the suspicions were well earned. In others they were unfair. Such suspicions affected even Mary the mother of Jesus. I'm about to show you why.

God does not welcome people into his family because they have their moral life in order. Rather, none of us have our lives in order morally and we come to God knowing that we need what only he offers. How God did this was a major risk. Put together with the why of which he came shows that the coming of Jesus to the earth stands as the all-time ultimate high risk high reward investment.

No one will get what the Christian faith is all about if they don't see both how Jesus came and why Jesus came. God took the ultimate risk in sending his son to the earth and we will risk all of ourselves to follow him.

This message covers familiar ground. But even if you have studied a passage many times before, you have matured in your knowledge of God, in your knowledge of the world and in your life experiences. You may see something you had not seen before, because though the passage has not changed, you have changed.

[Matthew 1:16 \(ESV\)](#)

16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Matthew describes Joseph differently than all the rest. The previous verse reads like all the others. And Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthew, and Mathan the father of Jacob and so it reads from the beginning. But Joseph is not listed as a father but as the husband to Mary. This does not support the theology that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life because other places in the NT show that Jesus had other brothers and sisters born to Mary and Joseph.

Why does it matter that we be convinced of the primary reason Jesus came?

1. Note the Risks of Following Jesus

[Matthew 1:18-19 \(ESV\)](#)

Matthew 1:18-19 (ESV) Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Matthew moves from that genealogy to zoom in on the actual birth story of Jesus. We have no actual evidence that this Jesus' birth happened in December. But it's good and right that we celebrate such a momentous occasion. The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. Luke focuses more on Mary. Matthew focuses more on Joseph. When Jesus's mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Joseph responds to this news the way you would expect anyone to respond who learned that their fiancé was pregnant and he knows that he knows that he knows that he's not the father. They were not confused about how this works. The reaction of Joseph provides strong evidence for the historicity of the birth narratives. Matthew lays the case out and we should not collapse the story without walking through it with Joseph.

Some of you have a sense of the pain Joseph felt in these moments, however long he remained in this state of resolving to divorce her quietly. You have experienced the sense of pain and betrayal that comes with suspecting that the one that you uniquely love has been with another person.

Joseph did not expect what happened. The OT law said he could not marry her in this instance, but she would be shamed at best and maybe executed for her sin. He was a just man. In this context this means he was careful to faithfully obey God's law. But he did not want to publicly shame Mary. So, he found a way to dissolve their formal relationship in the most quiet way that he could though, unwinding an engagement was more difficult then than now, though it's no easy thing now. Engagement then was more legal and formal than now.

In our time, couples often live together as married and try to enjoy the benefits of a sexual relationship before the commitment. Their culture followed the opposite of that practice, the commitments and the legal aspects were settled first, then sometime later they would begin living together as husband and wife.

Many people who call themselves Christians do not see what the Bible models and explicitly teaches as relevant to their own sexual behavior. Even if they say they believe that the Bible is the word of God. They give themselves a pass on this matter. Their thinking does not follow logically.

If this is actually the word of God, then God being God is infinite is his knowledge and understanding of human nature. He did not need to grow in his understanding. He did not need new philosophers to come along and generate new insights about how human relationships work. He sovereignly orchestrated the writing of this book through hundreds of years and many different authors. And it is all God breathed and useful for all time for correcting, rebuking, teaching, and training in righteousness.

However, if it's only the religious speculation of ancient peoples, then that's a very different animal, that's a completely different religion altogether. You can call it Christian, but it's not the same thing. It uses the same Bible and the names are all the same, but what they mean by those names represents something else altogether. It's a different religion as surely as muslim is different from hindu is different from Buddhist.

God took a great risk in bringing Jesus into the world in this way. He didn't just come as a baby and being physically vulnerable, but he came in that time with none of the modern means we have for safely protecting the mom and baby as they come into the world. And it was a risk socially because Joseph would have to risk his reputation. This mattered to him. That phrase he was a just man, means in this context that he was faithful and careful to obey the law of God.

We too will take great risks in following Jesus. God calls his people to obey him rather than the expectations of the culture of the time. That's true in how we think about sexual relationships, that's a part of this story. But it's also true that some of what God will call us to do won't make sense to us and but he insists we trust him anyway, but that's not the greatest risk we will take to follow God.

Why does it matter for us to have full confidence in the virgin birth of Christ?

2. Consider the long-term purpose of Jesus' coming

[Matthew 1:20-21 \(ESV\)](#)

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Why would Joseph be afraid? What sort of fear did he face? Was it fear of the loss of his reputation? The fear of the loss of the life he had always imagined? The boiling stew of emotions he must have felt would be hard to sort out. As a human being there would be fear, anger, hurt, disgust, and only God knows what else. But the angel focuses on fear. The word that he was a just man meant that he was careful to keep the law. The law stipulated that in such a case he had to divorce her. Forgiving her, working through it and moving on was not an option for him. So he feared perhaps most of all destroying his relationship with God. He feared blatantly going against the law by staying with her, but this seems to imply that was the direction in which his heart ran. He could also fear the ridicule or shame that he would be publicly admitting the blame for something that he knew he did not do.

For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. The gentle and delicate description of God's role in bringing about this pregnancy contrasts brightly with the crass stories of pagan gods who were often depicted as taken on the physical characteristics of a man and so impregnating women to produce demigods.

She will bear a son. This does not strike us as it did them because through ultra sound parents have the means to learn the sex of a baby before he or she is born. So this in itself was unusual news for Joseph. She will bear a son, and here is your role Joseph, your only role in bringing him into this world, **you shall call his name Jesus.** **Jesus** was a common name of the time that means God save us or something like that. What the angel says is, for he will save his people from their sins, for he will save his people from their sins, for he will save his people from their sins. I have more writing and thinking about this.

Ironically some have survived incredible falls from airplanes.

- There have been some incredible instances of people falling out of airplanes without parachutes and surviving. Take the story of Alan Magee, an American airman who survived a 22,000-foot fall from a damaged B-17 bomber over France in 1943. Thrown clear of the aircraft and rendered unconscious, he fell four miles before crashing through the glass roof of St. Nazaire train station, shattering it and miraculously surviving, though with severe injuries.
- The all-time record for surviving the highest fall without a parachute belongs to Yugoslavian flight attendant Vesna Vulović. She was the sole survivor of a bomb placed onboard JAT Flight 367 in 1972 which saw her plummet more than 30,000 feet. Experts believe she survived by being trapped by a food cart inside a section of the aircraft's fuselage which subsequently landed at an angle on a heavily wooded and snowy mountainside in Czechoslovakia.
- Soviet Air Force lieutenant Ivan Chisov and Royal Air Force sergeant Nicholas Alkemade also survived in similar circumstances, thrown clear of bombers in the Second World War before landing in a mixture of snow and trees. Remarkably, Alkemade only suffered a sprained leg after falling 18,000 feet. The following infographic provides a list of known occasions where people survived extremely high falls without a parachute.

<https://www.statista.com/chart/19708/known-occasions-where-people-survived-falls/>

- **Normally you would think falling out of a plane is instant death. But that's not the case.**
- **But in every case for every person. The wages of sin is death.**

[Romans 6:23](#) (ESV) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- **So we in fact need to be saved, even more so than we need to be saved from a fall from an airplane, because occasionally people survive that. But no one will survive the basic human condition of being a sinner.**
- **How will he do that? He will be born a virgin. He does not inherit our sin nature through his death.**
- **He will live a sinless life. Tempted in every way as we are . . .**
- **He will willingly die in our place. It's what we deserve, but he does this for us in our place.**
- **Our role is to trust & believe this. Only he can do the living, the dying, & rising from the dead.**
- **What would Joseph fear? Reputation? Jealousy? Sin? Being tainted by sin? Why does Gabriel use the word afraid?**

"Now, my friends, until you experience that, you know nothing; that is the first thing a man or woman can ever really know. What is more, unless you have experienced that, unless you have known that, you are not a Christian, you do not believe in Christ as your personal Saviour. Until you realise that, you cannot possibly have felt the need of Christ; you may have felt the need of help and advice and comfort, but until you awake to the fact that your nature itself is evil, until you realise that your trouble is not that you do this and that which is wrong, but that you yourself are wrong, and that your whole nature is wrong, until you realise that, you will never have felt the need of a Saviour. Christ cannot help or advise or comfort you until He has first of all saved you, until He has changed your nature. Oh, my friends, have you yet felt this? God have mercy upon you if you haven't. You need not be a rotter or a scamp to be a sinner. It makes no difference who you are or what you are, it makes no difference how good you may appear to be or how much good work you may do. You may have been inside the church all your life and actively engaged in its work, but still I say (and I am merely repeating what is said repeatedly in the Bible) that unless you have at some time or other felt that your very nature itself is sinful, that you are, in the words of St Paul, "dead in sins", then you have never known Jesus Christ as a Saviour, and if you do not know Him as a Saviour you do not know Him at all. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."
(Iain Hamish Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones)

Why does it matter that we be convinced of the primary reason Jesus came? Do you actually believe that this is true of you?

3. Delight in the immediate benefit of Jesus' birth

[Matthew 1:22-25 \(ESV\)](#)

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoke by the prophet; all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. All of it, all this. It had all happened to fulfill prophecy. I have give so little thought to this reality.

Behold, the virgin shall concede and bear a son, behold, behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, and they shall call his name Immanuel. How do I process the ways in which the nt uses the old in this instance. What the Holy Spirit means here is that Mary did not conceive in the ordinary way. She had not been with Jospheh in the way that every other baby born on he earth has happened. She remained a virgin and yet she had conceived. That's what it means.

And they shall call his name Immanuel which means God with us, God with us, God with us.

One of the most surprising news stories of this year surely was the insertion of Taylor Swift into the world of the NFL. But before that was her Eras Tour. When tickets went on sell it crashed the ticket issuing system. She sold out monster football stadiums and concerts that actually measured on the Richter scale. It was such a huge phenomenon that time magazine named her person of the year. But there has been incredible fascination with whether or not she is in attendance Chiefs games and when she is the cameras cut over to her to catch her reaction at numerous points in the game.

- She's the most famous woman on the planet. But that's not going to last. Soon enough it won't be a thing.
- But the news that God is with us has echoed down through the centuries and it will continue to stun through all eternity.
- Everyone in one sense draws benefit from this. Its from jesus that we most learned that the strong or to serve the weak and he taught so much about how to handle money and how to relate to people and our bodies and to marriage and so many other truths.
- But he didn't come primarily to teach. He came primarily to die. And that is the way that he saves his people from their sins.
- And for those who come to faith in him the wildest benefit of all, far better than having been there to see him as a baby or to see him walk on water or heal the sick. Jesus himself said just before he died. It's better for you if I go away. Because I will send to you the Helper the Holy Spirit. He will not just be with you. He will be in you.
- That's not a side truth of this book. It's right at the core of the story. God is with us all. But he is in those in the person of the Holy Spirit. Either that's true or none of it matters. God is with us.
- Jesus made the ultimate high risk high reward investment. He calls us to do the same.