

Christmas Hope: Mary and Christ's Birth

SCOTT HOEZEE

On Facebook, people will often send around puzzles to challenge others to see if they can solve it. One common such puzzle is a box filled with rows and rows and columns and columns of the number 581; but then the challenge is to see if you can spy the one spot in that blinding array of numbers where a different number occurs. Where is the exception? Well, it might take you a minute, but eventually you see it: way down near the bottom on the left side is a 587 instead of a 581. I mean, with everything the same, it takes some effort to see the one different part. Matthew 1 has something like that in the family tree of Jesus, and today on *Groundwork*, we will see what that is and how it unlocks for us the mystery and wonder of Christmas. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the end, the fifth episode of our five-part series on the genealogy or the family tree of Jesus that opens the gospel of Matthew. Again, so far in this Advent and Christmas series, we have noticed the first four women whose names and stories Matthew included: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and then Uriah's wife, Bathsheba; and we have noted two main things, I think, so far. First, each woman is a non-Israelite, hinting to Matthew's readers that even as the Messiah was produced from a family line that included people from different nations, so the Messiah came to save all nations and not just Israel or the Jewish people; but then we have noticed something else, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

We also noticed that these are not the cleanest, most nice stories. There is a lot of difficulty; there is a lot of brokenness; and if you wanted to have a squeaky-clean story, or at least a happier story, you could have picked Sarah, you could have picked Rebecca...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But in this case, he picked these stories with these names that have very broken and challenging stories; hard to hear, and not necessarily Sunday school material, but that is in turn why we have Jesus and why we needed him to come. He is a real human being, he had real brokenness that he came through in order to fix this world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But there is one other woman whose name makes it into the family tree, and this one isn't at all surprising. If we were surprised to find Rahab the prostitute from Jericho, we are not at all surprised to find the name of Jesus' mother Mary. That is the one name you would expect...

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here is how it goes: At the end of Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1: ^{15b}Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Now, like that Facebook puzzle, Darrell, I was just referring to, where you have to find the one number that is different among, you know, a whole array of other numbers, what is different here than everything that came in the first fifteen verses of Matthew 1?

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, you have the father of this, the father of that, so-and-so begat so-and-so; that happens a lot, but then we see the switch when you get to Joseph.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, there is no father of for Joseph to connect to Jesus, but we see the mother, we see the husband of Mary in that situation, and that is what is different. It is just like it is a change in the middle of the genealogy, where they add the husband of Mary instead of the father of.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, yes; fifteen whole verses of father of, father of, father of, or in the old King James: begat, begat, begat, begat; and all of a sudden, we get to Joseph and Joseph gets no begat...he gets no father of. My New Testament professor at Calvin Seminary back when I was a student, David Holwerda, called this a holy irregularity. This is the single exception in this family tree, or in any family tree, I guess, for that matter, where someone is not listed as the father to the next person in line, but it is just the husband of the woman who is listed as the mother of the next child in line; of course, in this case, that is Jesus. As we have said, genealogies are not the most enticing things and exciting things you could read. Your eyes kind of glaze over, but our eyes were supposed to pop a little bit when we got to Bathsheba and Rahab and those other...Tamar and those other women; but we are also supposed to, I think, pause here about what is going on with Joseph. Why is he not a father of the next person?

DARRELL DELANEY

So, there are some birth certificates that have one parent's name on them, even though both parents were involved, and for a variety of reasons that happens; and in this case, Joseph's name cannot be put in the father part of the birth certificate, and so, of course, Mary knows because she got a message from the angel that she is going to be the mother of Jesus, but Joseph doesn't know any of what is going on there; and so, it is really hard to explain to people who know this isn't the real father or they don't know if this is the real father. There could be some little bit of scandal that is attached to that. I am sure we will talk about that at some point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, yes; I mean, if you were a kid, suppose that you were looking at your family tree and you notice that your grandpa...your grandfather...is not listed as the father of your Uncle Albert, but he is just listed as the husband of your grandma. So, you might say to your mom, "Mom, what is up with that?" And then your mom might get kind of a funny look on her face, and she would lean over and whisper, "Well, you see, honey, Grandpa married Grandma when she was already pregnant, but it wasn't his baby." Oh, well...that explains why Uncle Albert doesn't look like his brothers so much. So, that would be the explanation you would expect. Some other man was the father of Jesus. It wasn't Joseph. He was just the husband of Mary. So, on the surface of it, this looks bad.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when you look at this and you try to find out what is going on with the holy irregularity that you mentioned, it is really interesting how it could have been a scandal attached to her name as well...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have seen the scandal attached to Tamar's name and their history; we have seen the scandal in Ruth and Rahab's stories, and even in Bathsheba's story last time, but now we are realizing that we thought that Mary's story would just be kind of squeaky clean, or at least cleaner than the others; but then, okay, so Joseph is not the father, so there could be a scandal there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For all appearances, you would think: Well, okay; well, what do you know? We thought we were done with that after we got rid of Bathsheba, you know, quite a few verses ago or quite a few father of, father of, begats, begats ago; but maybe Mary has to get in line with those other women. Maybe there is something scandalous going on here. Again, that would be the only logical explanation if it were anybody else's family; but that is not the case here, of course. But of course, we know, as readers, Darrell, we often have an advantage. I mean, a lot of the biblical books have what they call in literature an omniscient narrator; and so, we often get clued in as readers what is up, and what is going on; and when you get really, really used to a story, you forget what it must have been like to read it for the first time, or you forget what it was like when you didn't already know the ending; and I think at Christmas we tend to forget that the thing that we get all excited about, and the thing that we sing beautiful Christmas carols about actually began looking kind of bad; and I think that tells us something; and I think there is a theological message in there for us.

DARRELL DELANEY

We have, over the centuries, romanticized and deodorized, if you will, the Christmas story; and the Christmas story is supposed to be a really earthy story...a story that deep down in real human existence that does not move away from brokenness, does not move away from sin, does not move away from pain, and literally explains why Jesus has come. So, in this next segment, we want to talk a little bit more about that. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we just noted the hiccup—the holy irregularity in Matthew 1 that breaks the long pattern in this chapter of the person listed as the father of the next person...the father of, the father of, except Joseph is not the father of Jesus, he is just the husband of Mary; and we just said, hey, if it were anybody else's family tree we would know what was up. Somebody else was the father of Uncle Albert, and it wasn't Grandpa. He was the father of the other children that came later; and that is what Joseph thought. I mean, why wouldn't he?

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in a natural solution, or else the logical conclusion is that there must be another man involved here...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And traditionally speaking, this rocks the culture of what they are in; like, you get betrothed, you get married, you have children, but not the other way around...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, Joseph comes to that same conclusion, and we see it here in Matthew 1, where it says:

¹⁸This 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. ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Joseph, we are told in scripture, is a righteous man, and we are going to talk a little bit more about this. Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew is really important. Righteousness was important for the covenant people of Israel; of course, it was, right? You had to be righteous and holy as God is holy. So, being righteous is the goal, and Joseph is introduced to us here as a righteous man, and a righteous man cannot stay righteous if he gets mixed up in scandal.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Mary cheated on him; what other explanation could there be? He cannot maintain his righteousness and stay with her. He could be very harsh with her; he could haul her out into the street and yell at her...

DARRELL DELANEY

Have her stoned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; he could do lots of...he is a decent enough man that he is going to do it quietly, but he is ending this thing. He is breaking the engagement, because how could he stay righteous if he gets messed up with fornication, with Mary having slept with another man? What other explanation could there be?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think this is one of the things, Scott, that we gloss over when we think about Christmas; and like I said, we want to think about the angel, we want to think about the messenger, we want to think about the beautiful and glittery things, but we don't really understand that this is a scandal; and Joseph is saying: I cannot be caught up in this scandal. I am going to find a way because I care about her and I am righteous, I want to do this in a way that is not going to bring harm to her; but the marriage is off. It is all over until God has to intervene and make sure that he understands what happened.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, in verse 20 of Matthew 1: But after he [Joseph] had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph 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. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said to the prophet: ²³"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"

(which means “God with us”). ²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

So again, it takes an angel of the Lord to convince Joseph. It took the angel of the Lord to convince Mary, too, by the way. So, it took an angel to convince them both.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, they had to actually keep this on the downlow because, I mean, who would believe that? That is a miraculous story of an angel...an angelic being coming to give them both a message to let them know this is going to happen. Now, we have read this story so many times that we are like: Oh, okay; well, of course we know the story. We know what is going to happen; but we forget sometimes that this is new information to them...this is a brand new development for them. They are surprised by all of the things that we read over and over as kids and such.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You can kind of imagine how it would go, right? Somebody would say to Joseph: Well, what is going on with Mary? And he would say: It’s okay; and angel told her that this is a miracle of God; and the person would say: Oh, really? An angel came to Mary, and you believed her? Well, yeah; and an angel came to me, too! Oh, so you *both* talked to an angel. Okay, Joseph; have a nice day...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yeah, right...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yeah, right; even Jesus’ arrival in this world got clouded up by apparent brokenness. Now, it wasn’t real in this case. It *was* real brokenness, what we saw with Rahab and Bathsheba, but even here, there is an apparent glitch of morality. Joseph has to redefine his own righteousness; and that is what Jesus is going to end up doing throughout his whole life. He is going to make all of Israel redefine what the right thing is, and it starts with his own earthly, though not biological father, Joseph. So, Joseph sets the tone for the whole gospel.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you know what is interesting is that, like I said earlier, that this story is a scandalous story; and God is using this scandalous story and turning it on its head in order to have actually these divine beings to communicate this is what is actually happening; and the incarnation of God’s Son happens in a situation that looks like a mess...that looks like scandal...that looks like a problem; and God uses this very situation to redeem all of humanity. It is really powerful to see.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, it is interesting that what happens to Mary here, people probably whispered behind her back, if they didn’t say it directly to her face: You sinned. Now, she didn’t, but what is going to happen to Jesus? The religious authorities are going to come up to him again and again: You are a sinner; you are a glutton and a winebibber; you break the Sabbath; you are a sinner, Jesus; you hang out with tax collectors and prostitutes, and you eat with them! You cannot be the Messiah because you are a sinner, and the Messiah cannot be a sinner. So, Mary gets accused of sin, which wasn’t true, but that just previews Jesus is going to get accused of sin. In fact, at the end of the day, he is considered such a terrible sinner, he gets crucified as a sinner; and the crowds in Jerusalem even let a *true* criminal, Barabbas, go in order for Jesus, who never did a thing wrong, to die like a sinner. It is all kind of a unity in Matthew.

DARRELL DELANEY

And even at the end of his life, before he was crucified, they would rather pick a criminal, Barabbas...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Than to have Jesus, who has done nothing wrong; and there is this cloud of sin that is kind of...people accused him of, that they assume is happening, that isn't the case because God is actually helping us to understand that his redeeming nature comes through these complicated circumstances; and this sinful situation is actually weaved through and showing us why Jesus had to come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it is just interesting that, Darrell, our salvation couldn't come without the people most intimately involved in it: Mary, Joseph, and then finally Jesus himself, getting caught up in the brokenness of this world, so much so that they got accused of all kinds of false things; that they are sinners, they are not righteous; if you were really righteous, you would act like the Pharisees; you wouldn't associate with those people. There is just no getting out of it, but that is the point. There has got to be a way out of it, and the way out of it is Jesus.

So, as we conclude this episode, but also this series, we will wonder about how this part of Matthew 1 opens up the true wonder of Christmas for us. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Darrell, we have been in Matthew 1 for a five-part series here...four Sundays of Advent and Christmas itself...and we are at the Christmas part of the story now. We opened this series first saying you had to sort of admire Matthew's style, how he put this genealogy—this family tree—together. First, he shocked and scandalized us by putting the names of foreign women who, most of them, had some pretty difficult stories attached to them. Then he lobs in the fact that Joseph was just the husband of Mary, but not the father of Jesus; but what he does all along, Darrell, is he is smuggling in a lot of good theology.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes, yes; he is sneaking in some good contraband there. So, it is powerful because he is showing the miracle of the incarnation. We've got the second—Son of the Trinity here, who is being born into bodily form. So, like, you know the scripture in Philippians 2, where it says: ⁶ paraphrased The Son, Jesus, doesn't consider equality with God something to hold onto, but he emptied himself and became like the nature of a person. So, I think it is really powerful that we have the God of the cosmos, who is able to shrink down into a microscopic zygote, who is able to shrink down into a molecule. It is one thing for God to be big, but it is another for a big God to make himself small, and that is really powerful; and Matthew is showing that the incarnation came through this powerful way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you know, at Christmas we think a lot about the baby in the manger; and sometimes we think: Wow; isn't it amazing; that little goat's feed trough, and the Son of God can lay within that little confine; but as you just said, it was more amazing than that. Before he got to that point, he was a microscopic zygote in Mary's uterus. That is really, really amazing.

You know, I am reminded by what you were saying a moment ago, Darrell, the Old Testament often marveled...and you particularly see this in the psalms...that God, who is so majestic, noticed us in our littleness, right? So, Psalm 8: ¹Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. But what are we that you even notice us, right? Or Psalm 113, where God is so big, ^(verses 7-9) and yet he notices the woman struggling to have children, and he helps her to have children. He notices the pauper, and he lifts up the poor person and seats them among the princes. So, the Israelites were always amazed that God, who is so big, could see us, who are so small. Well, now the God who is so big, gets small so as to literally become one

of us.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really powerful because we are contrasting God's transcendence, and also his eminence in how he is involved in the very small details of life, including the fertilization here. It is really powerful that God would do all of this to come into this world to save us. It shows how big his love, how long and high and wide and deep his love is for us. It also shows that he is willing to go through whatever is necessary to redeem creation; and I see that, also too, we could look at Paul, who alludes to this in Galatians 4, and he says: ⁴But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷So you are not longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, what Paul is saying there, Darrell... We have been in the family tree of Jesus in this entire series from Matthew 1, and guess what? The family tree didn't end with Joseph the husband of Mary. It has gone on and on, and our names are in it now, Darrell. We can find *our* names...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the family tree of Jesus; and we no more belong there than Tamar and Rahab and Bathsheba and Ruth, but by grace...as Paul was saying in Galatians 4...by grace we now have been adopted, and we are sons and daughters; and our names now are in the family tree of Jesus on account of his birth, his death, and his resurrection. We can now call God our Father, as Jesus invited us to do.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is also important to mention, too, earlier we talked about Joseph, his earthly father...I don't know if we can call him a stepfather fairly, but he is the one in the Bible who never speaks anything...he never says anything...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he is just referred to in Matthew and Luke, and he never says anything; and then we hear about his death later on; but Joseph, through his actions, showed that he was doing what God asked him. He submitted to what was new knowledge to him. He humbled himself in the situation where a divine being let him know what the plan was, and he went along with God's plan...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he is modeling the righteousness that has actually been attributed to his name, and God helped him to redefine what righteousness really was in that situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if we fast-forward just a few chapters in this same Gospel of Matthew, and get to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, and Jesus is going to take Israel to school. Bit by bit, commandment by commandment, Jesus will redefine what righteousness really is...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is not what the Pharisees thought. Just looking good on the outside, even if your heart is full of pride and envy and all kinds of other junk. No; to be a true child of God...to be adopted into the family that Paul talked about in Galatians 4...means that you are pure on the inside and the outside; and what is on the outside flows from the inside. That is what true righteousness is, as Jesus helps Joseph to redefine it, but also as Jesus is going to try to help all of Israel to redefine it; and you know what? It means kind of living in an upside-down way, right? That is the Beatitudes in Matthew 5; but it also means, Darrell, recognizing everybody is our neighbor, everybody can be in the family; we are called to love all.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that you said that, Scott, because everyone is our neighbor. It shows that in the genealogy of Jesus. We've got Rahab, who came from this other country; we've got Bathsheba, who came from this other country; we have Ruth, who came from this other country; and even though there are a lot of things that are happening in their stories...these things that are painful and that are broken...and society would label them as sinners and cast them off to the side as nobodies...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And these are the people which Jesus, the one who brings salvation, comes through; and even in the story of Jesus' family...even those who would be considered to be voiceless, that would be disregarded, they would be marginalized, but they are brought into the genealogy of Jesus; which means anyone who is obscure, anyone who feels like they are less than, God says: No; you, you are welcome to become part of this family. You are welcome to become part of the body.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the love of God, or as Paul put it in the letter to the Ephesians: ^{3:17b}I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Darrell, I think that should be our dearest wish, at Christmas and at all times, to know that great, great love of God. Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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