

“Christmas at Matthew’s House”

Series: *Christmas at the Gospel Writers’ Homes*

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: December 15, 2024



During these Advent weeks, we are looking at Christmas through the eyes of each Gospel writer. And we have been adding a slight twist by considering how they might have decorated their homes.

When I think of Matthew’s home, I have to confess that I don’t really think of Christmas decorations. But — I do think about the tradition that we once had in our country of having a painting of our heroes on the walls of our homes and businesses. For example, after the Revolutionary War, it was not uncommon for Americans to hang a picture of George Washington in their parlor. Similarly, there was a time when Abraham Lincoln and other presidents have decorated the walls of American homes.

I think Matthew would have loved the idea of having a wall of heroes in his home.

Of course, there would be no presidents on Matthew’s walls.

Instead, Matthew’s wall would contain portraits of several of the great heroes from the Old Testament. We have a hint of this in the way that Matthew opens his Gospel. Matthew opens his Gospel with sixteen verses detailing the genealogy of Jesus.

This genealogy of Jesus contains many of the heroes of the Bible . . . like the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - and the kings David and Solomon.

By beginning with a genealogy, Matthew signals to us that he is all in about how the past has shaped the present.

Matthew wants his audience to know that the Old Testament has been pointing to Jesus’ coming as the Messiah for a long, long, long time. There is even a reference to a savior in the Book of Genesis.

You see, for Matthew, the Old Testament is important because it is a record of God’s faithfulness to God’s people, even when they were not faithful to God.

God created us and desires to be in relationship with us and throughout time, God has ever been moving toward us in love.

Our Old Testament reading gives us a remarkable description of the qualities of the shoot that came out of the line of David. Written hundreds of years before Christ was born, Isaiah’s words spoke of a ruler who would come and bring all the best of God to God’s people.

Isaiah’s words may have seemed hard to believe since it seemed that the relationship between God and God’s people was fraught with disappointments. We can see in the Bible that God was disappointed in the choices that God’s people made not to be faithful to God. And we can also see the disappointments that the people felt, when God did not show up in the ways they wanted God to show up.

It is our New Testament lesson that brings the promises of the Old Testament prophets into focus. At long last, a Messiah is mentioned. The long ago promise that a Messiah would come out of the root of Jesse, the family tree of King David is finally being fulfilled.

Instead of trumpets being sounded at the announcement . . . there is again disappointment. God is once again not showing up the way that is either expected or desired.

“Christmas at Matthew’s House”

Series: *Christmas at the Gospel Writers’ Homes*

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: December 15, 2024



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

In our New Testament passage, we can’t help but feel Joseph’s disappointment. We do not know, of course, about Joseph’s personal feelings for Mary at their betrothal. We do not know if this was a love match or an arranged marriage. But, we can guess that he was pleased with the betrothal, that he had begun making plans for a life with Mary, that he had taken joy in the idea of having a family. When we get engaged, we engage ourselves to a dream of a future.

Yet, all of this came crashing down when Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant. We aren’t told how Joseph heard, but we can only imagine it coming as quite a shock. Out of wedlock pregnancies have happened throughout history, but it was not the norm. Joseph must have felt such hurt and disappointment at Mary’s apparent betrayal with another man.

Can you remember a recent time when you were disappointed?
It may have been some unexpected news like Joseph.
It may have been an expectation you had about something that wasn’t realized.
It may have been the election results.
It may have been a medical diagnosis.
It may have been a loss of someone dear to you.
It may have been watching a future hope crumble into dust.

We have all been there at some point in time — and some of us are living in the disappointment now. Disappointment is a part of the human experience.

Typically, when we are disappointed, we are not . . . shall we say . . . at our best. We are hurt. We want to strike out. We might want to have a tantrum. We might look for the easy way out. We might want to numb ourselves with alcohol. We might want to blame others and seek justice.

It is intriguing to me that both God and Joseph have disappointments and yet they seek the path of integrity — not just the easy path. They stay committed to what is important. They stay true to themselves.

We aren’t told how quickly Joseph came to his decision to “go easy on Mary.” It is likely that he had to work through his feelings first before he could land at a compassionate stance. Our reading this morning only reveals where Joseph landed. It reveals Joseph’s north star, if you will — to operate out of compassion rather than vengeance.

Our reading also shows us that God is a part of the process in Joseph’s decision-making. Not all of us are given dreams to show us the truth of a situation and to show us a way forward when it seems like the path ahead is only filled with sorrow. But God is still with us . . . loving us, guiding us, being for us, and being with us.

“Christmas at Matthew’s House”

Series: *Christmas at the Gospel Writers’ Homes*

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: December 15, 2024



This is Matthew’s whole point . . . God has been with us since the very, very beginning and has been faithful ever since.

Matthew is telling us that God’s love and faithfulness has found a new form . . . human form . . . our own form . . . Jesus is Emmanuel. Jesus is God with us.

God came in the form of the creation that has been unfaithful so that we might see that God’s disappointment is not the last word — instead, God’s faithfulness is the last word.

“The beauty of Jesus being our good news is that our missteps and our past doesn’t define us.”¹

And whatever disappointments we are experiencing, whatever challenges we are in the midst of — God is there with us.

O come, O come, Emmanuel . . . this day and every day. Amen.

¹ Mike Ahn, CCCA Advent Calendar, email December 15, 2024..