

Christmas at Matthew's House Matt. 1:1-7, 15-16

'Tis the season for parties, isn't it?

How many of you

have already been to a holiday party this week?

How many of you have more
parties coming up?

That's what I thought,

'tis the season.

The Christmas party,

if you could call it party,

it was more like a support group
or an AA meeting

—but last we were at Mark's house,

and it was austere and somber.

But that's Mark and Mark knows

that so many of us

need that this time of year.

We need the reassurance

that Christ is with us in the wilderness;

even when the wilderness

is the holiday season.



However, the scene is a lot different

when you go

to Matthew's house for Christmas.

First off, there is no mistaking Matthew's house
for anyone else's.

Where Mark really had no decorations,

nothing to indicate it was the Christmas season

—Matthew's last name might have been Griswold;

he has a giant, light-up star

strapped to his chimney.

The whole neighborhood can see it.



Not only that, he has inflatable wise men
staked in his front yard.

No one is sure where he got them,
Lowe's and Home Depot only sell the nativity scene—
so, he's the only house with the Magi.

Plus, there are a lot of cars
at Matthew's house too.

After reading the first chapter this morning
—we understand why there are so many cars.

Matthew's party is a family reunion!



Matthew invites the whole lot to his house;
the great aunts and uncles,
the cousins twice removed—
family that included stepparents
and children;
the sister who is newly divorced
and the flamboyant brother who never married.

Everybody gets invited
and everybody brings a dish to share.

It is likely that you will see family members
you didn't even know you had
when you're having Christmas at Matthew's house.

It's loud and fun,
kids and adults everywhere,
teenagers drinking Christmas punch in reindeer glasses
—the in-laws, the ones who married in
a bunch of them are standing out on the porch
just to grab *some air*;
it is just how you'd imagine
an extended family Christmas celebration to be.

While the outside decorations
are something to behold,
Matthew takes the most pride
in his Christmas tree.
It is actually what the family is here for
—to admire Matthew's tree.

Scott Black Johnston says
that when you look at the Christmas tree
in Matthew's living room,
you'll do a double take—
it isn't a Fraser fir or a hearty cedar;
it isn't artificial either;
Matthews' Christmas tree is actually a family tree.¹



“Abraham, was the father of Isaac
and Isaac was the father of Jacob...”
Matthew reads the beginning of his Christmas story
and it sounds pretty clean and clear.
But as he keeps going,
he reads even the uncomfortable parts
of the family line:
“Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar;” ...
“Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab...”

¹ Scott Black Johnston: Christmas at Matthew's House; Matthew 1:1-7, 15-16 2nd Sunday of Advent - Special December 09, 2018

and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth...
David was the father of Solomon
by the wife of Uriah..."

Christmas at his house sounds a lot
like the Robert Earl Keen song,
Christmas from the Family:

Brother Ken brought his kids with him
The three from his first wife Lynn
And the two identical twins
From his second wife Mary Nell
Of course he brought his new wife, Kay
Who talks all about AA
Chain smokin' while the stereo plays
Noel, Noel, the First Noel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqN483jm6JE> (let's do just audio and show the lyrics; start at 1 min and play until 1:42)



This messy family tree,
that Matthew insists on reciting,
includes adulterous great-grandfathers
and great-grandmothers who were prostitutes
and despised foreigners;
a father who had twins with his daughter-in-law;
and a woman who was never given the opportunity
to tell the king, *no*.

Hearing all this might makes us squirm a little bit,
but not Matthew.

You remember the scene in Christmas Vacation
when Clark sits down and reads
The Night Before Christmas to everyone;
well in Matthew's house

it's the same sense of calm and peace in chaos
as he sits down and reads
through the family generations.
The beauty of reading it all aloud is,
there are no secrets
and there is no sense of shame.
Reading it out loud doesn't bother anyone.
No one's feathers are ruffled or roused—
they smile remembering that this is a family
that isn't perfect,
far from it.

As Matthew gets toward the end of his reading,
his format changes just once
and if you aren't paying attention
you'd miss it.

Everyone included in the genealogy
has been "the father of so and so"
—until he gets to the second most important person
included in Jesus's family tree.

The format follows a pattern
of fatherhood,
until we get to Joseph.
Matthew reads, "and Eliud the father of Eleazar,
and Eleazar the father of Matthan,
and Matthan the father of Jacob,
¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph
the husband of Mary,
of whom Jesus was born,
who is called the Messiah."

Did you hear it?
Joseph isn't the father of Jesus,
he is *the husband* of Mary.



Theologically, Matthew is making the point
that Jesus is different, unique,
he is the Messiah.

His lineage is both human and divine.
So, while Matthew is keen on reminding you
that God is Jesus's heavenly father,
he is also keen on reminding you
what a crucial role Joseph plays in Jesus's life
as his earthly one.

Joseph shines in this gospel
more than any other.

Matthew's Christmas story paints Joseph
as 'a righteous man,
unwilling to expose Mary
to public disgrace;
a man who intended to privately dismiss her
when he found out she was pregnant,
but not by him.

Can you imagine the inner wrestling
that must have gone on;
the turmoil of deciding what to do
with a fiancé who is pregnant with someone else's child?

God is aware that Joseph will need help to get through this.
In Matthew's good news of Jesus
the angel visits Joseph **3 different times**;
and it is in divine revelation to Joseph (not Mary)
that we hear who this child is
and what he will do.

Matthew wants us to remember
that even though Joseph didn't beget Jesus,
Joseph is the stand-in, adoptive father
crucial to the safety of this fragile child
who will be born into
a violent, oppressive empire.

Here at Matthews's house,
angelic messages come again and again,

with guiding and support for Joseph.
Joseph is a star in this story.
Though his light fades from the narrative of Jesus' life
as the gospel continues,
Matthew *here* at Christmas every year
makes sure the memory and actions,
of this adoptive father are included.

Maybe you heard this story this week,
about Michael Orlando Clark Jr.,
the 5-year-old who invited his whole kindergarten class
to the courthouse
on his adoption day in Kent County, Michigan.

But in case you haven't
here it is;

and pay close attention
to Michael and his new, adopted dad:

https://www.khou.com/article/life/family/kent-county-adoption-day/69-c037502e-f0ae-4dbb-a1f0-38744b17c127?fbclid=IwAR2hquHPuOWtFzA4n4spCrA_bS69t5Jwl-2gHg5ds2YwYEI9zNsrkxv5VHo



It is likely that similar to Michael and his dad David,
Jesus and Joseph
may not have exactly looked much alike.
But that never stopped Joseph
from looking at Jesus
and agreeing that being given the gift to parent,
especially a child who has another birth father,
is, *too much*,
but in the best way.

Joseph isn't mentioned by name
later in the story of Jesus,
but his influence is there.
Joseph is the father

who would have taken Jesus to the synagogue
to learn to pray and read the scriptures.
Joseph is the one who would have likely
taught Jesus his trade of carpentry.
Joseph along with Mary,
influences how Jesus learned
to treat other people.
Joseph nurtured Jesus
the way fathers (and mothers) do.

Later on, in Matthew story of Jesus's life,
when Jesus makes
his first public appearance
to read scripture
in his hometown synagogue;
the people are amazed at what he knows,
and ask in disbelief,
isn't this the carpenter's son?
They define him by his family;
they name him as Joseph's son.
Which meant that Jesus's neighbors and friends
knew only Joseph as Jesus's father.
Joseph accepted, lovingly,
the opportunity, the responsibility and the gift
to parent Jesus as his own.

Joseph gets a hearty pat on the back,
as Matthew reads the Christmas story.
There is a lot going on
at Christmas in Matthew's house;
music, stories, laughter
but he keeps pointing to his tree,
to the family tree.
He points out the bare spots here
and scraggly branches there.
Matthew knows that families
are complex and complicated;
they are messy and wonderful,
painful and influential.



The funny thing is,
I think Matthew's would want us
to linger a little longer
in living room with the tree.

We sometimes want to go ahead
and jump to the next part of the story;
you know, skip the family history
and dive right into the story
of how Mary and Joseph were engaged
but not yet living together
but she was found to be with child...

Instead Matthew, right away,
invites us to wipe our feet and come in.
The house is full but there's room.
Joseph built a large dining room table
so just set down your dish and start
greeting the family
you haven't seen since last year.

When that's all done,
we'll join everyone crowded into the living room
because the longer
we admire Matthew's tree,
the more we see
that rather Joseph adopting Jesus,
it's the other way around;
it is *Jesus* that adopts *Joseph*.
In fact, because of Matthew's Christmas tree,
We see the gospel, the good news;
that in Jesus,
God is adopting all of us.²

² ibid

