



from the desk of . . .
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Jesus At The Movies - 3

MIRACLE ON 34th STREET

Matthew 1:1-17

Is there a Santa Claus? ...

Back in 1897 Dr. Philip O'Hanlon, a coroner's assistant in N.Y.C., was asked by his 8-year-old daughter, Virginia ... whether Santa Claus really existed.

O'Hanlon suggested that she write to "The Sun", which was the prominent newspaper at the time, assuring her that "if you see it in The Sun, it's so."

Virginia heeded her Dad's suggestion, & wrote what has become one of the most reprinted letters in newspaper history. (X)

Dear Editor -

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, "If you see it in The Sun, it's so." Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia O'Hanlon

Her letter found its' way into the hands of veteran editor, Francis Church. (X)

The son of a Baptist minister, Church had worked for The N.Y. Sun for about 20 years. When controversial subjects had to be tackled on the editorial page, especially those dealing with theology ...

the assignments were usually given to Church.

Now, he had in his hands a little girl's letter on a most controversial matter ... & he was burdened with the responsibility of answering it. "Is there a Santa Claus?"

the childish scrawl of the letter writer asked.

At once, Church knew that there was no avoiding the question. He must answer, & he must answer truthfully. And so, he turned to his desk, & he began his reply which has become one of the most memorable editorials in newspaper history.

Do you remember the opening line of Church's editorial response? ...

("Yes, Virginia there is a Santa Claus.")

That sentiment has been the basis of more than one Hollywood movie ... the most memorable of which was "Miracle On 34th Street." (X)

Real quickly the plot ... Kris Kringle is asked to be Santa in the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade because the original man was intoxicated. Kris does so well, that he's hired to play Santa at Macy's flagship N.Y.C. store on 34th St.

Ignoring instructions to steer parents to buy from Macy's, Kris directs shoppers to stores where they can find exactly what their children want.

The other story line in the movie deals with Susan, the daughter of Macy's Event Coordinator. Both she & her mother, Doris, have developed a friendship with their neighbor, who is an attorney.

The story unfolds as Kris Kringle attempts to convince everyone that he is really Santa Claus.

Everything is brought to a head at a trial on Christmas Eve, where, even Mr. Macy, when asked if he believes Kris to be Santa, states ... "I do!"

At which point the District Attorney wants proof that Kris is "the one and only" Santa Claus on the basis of some competent authority. Which is where we pick up the story ...

(movie clip begins at 1:26:11 & ends at 1:29:58)

It's a feel-good movie ... & I love it. In fact, I enjoy the whole idea of Santa Claus ... & apparently, in that vein, I'm completing "The 4 Stages Of Life" ...

- I believed in Santa Claus
- I didn't believe in Santa Claus
- I was Santa Claus, & now ...
- I look like Santa Claus

Good News this morning from Matthew, to you who have gathered for worship at C.C.R.M.

Within your hearing now comes the Word of the Lord ...

This is the list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, who was a descendant of Abraham.

From Abraham to King David, the following ancestors are listed: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah & his brothers; then Perez & Zerah (their mother was Tamar), Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz (his mother was Rahab), Obed (his mother was Ruth), Jesse, & King David.

From David to the time when the people of Israel were taken into exile in Babylon, the following ancestors are listed: David, Solomon (his mother was the woman who had been Uriah's wife), Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, & Jehoiachin & his brothers.

From the time after exile in Babylon to the birth of Jesus, the following ancestors are listed: Jehoiachin, Shealtiel, Zerubbalel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob, & Joseph, who married Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was called the Messiah.

So then, there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon, and fourteen from then to the birth of the Messiah. (Matthew 1:1-17)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

The movie, "Miracle On 34th Street", acknowledged that there were difficulties in accepting the idea that there ... really is a Santa Claus.

And how does the movie solve that question? ... It appealed to a higher authority ... the U.S. Postal Service. And because of that, & other evidence, the resulting change that took place in the lives of the main characters was the "miracle" in that movie.

But the miracle was brought about because they found a reason to believe ... a reason to believe that which had been difficult, otherwise, to accept.

Now, God knew that humanity would also find it problematic to believe what He was going to do ... this whole incarnation thing. I mean, the very idea that Almighty God, (X) the Creator & Sustainer of the universe, (Colossians 1:16-17) the One who holds it all together would become a human being & actually live among us ...

(John 1:14) that's got to be crazy, right? ...

Who would ever come up with an idea like this? ...
 "You're trying to tell me that the Creator takes the form of the creature that He created. (Isaiah 55:8-9) ...

I don't think so."

Think about it ... why would Almighty God come down from Heaven & become an infant, born in an obscure stable, in some out-of-the-way town called Bethlehem?

There are many today who still find that whole concept hard to believe. So, God supplied **proof**.

Listen again to the final verse of this morning's Scripture lesson.

"There were 14 generations from Abraham to David,
& 14 from David to the exile in Babylon,
& 14 from then to the birth of the Messiah."

I completely believe that every word, every genealogy, & in this case, even every #, that's in this Book is here because God intended it to be here. That means that there are no worthless words ...
they're all in here for a reason.

Which means, right here, in these easily overlooked words, God is providing us with some of the proof that we human beings would need to believe that which otherwise might be difficult to accept.

I've told you on multiple occasions that I like to kind of visualize the various characters or stories that I'm reading about in Scripture. So, I'm imagining Matthew working on his Gospel. He's doing his research into all aspects of Jesus' ministry. He's checking out His background. He's confirming all his information.

I can see him pouring over the O.T., looking at the names of all of Jesus' ancestors. As a former tax collector (Matthew 9:9) this would be part of his make-up. And as he begins to put his findings down on papyrus ... just then he sees something.

It's kind of a divine revelation & it excites him.

I can visualize him calling out to his wife ... "Hannah, Hannah, come here, look at this!" And he points to the information on his paper. Matthew discovered something ... he found evidence of the workings of God.

"There were 14 generations from Abraham to David, & there were another 14 generations from David to the exile to Babylon, & then, look at this ... another 14 generations from the exile till Jesus was born!"

Between each of the major events in the history of Israel, Matthew saw the evidence that Jesus' ancestry had never been an **accident** or a haphazard quirk of **fate**.

God had planned out the entire course of human history, even to the minor details, which was coming to pass here throughout the previous 42 generations ... & that would have been exciting to Matthew ...

hey, it's exciting to me!

"In all his wisdom & insight God did what he had proposed, & made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ."

(Ephesians 1:8-9)

God had a **plan**. And He had it
from the foundations of the world. (1 Peter 1:20)

In other words, Jesus didn't shed His blood on the cross by accident or by a terrible mistake. His death & sacrifice was the plan of God from the beginning of time.

One of the amazing things that Bible scholars point out as we study the Scriptures especially during the Advent & Christmas seasons, as well as the Lenten & Easter seasons, is the # of prophecies that speak of a coming Messiah ... & what He was going to do.

We're all familiar with a # of them.

Actually, one Bible scholar cites 353 specific O.T. prophecies about the coming Messiah being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Let me share a couple of my favorites from Isaiah ...

"A child is born to us! A son is given to us!

And he will be our ruler.

He will be called, 'Wonderful Counselor,' 'Mighty God,'

'Eternal Father,' 'Prince of Peace.'

His royal power will continue to grow;

his kingdom will always be at peace.

He will rule as King David's successor,

basing his power on right & justice,

from now until the end of time.

The LORD Almighty is determined to do all this."

(Isaiah 9:6-7)

That was written 800 years before Jesus was born.

Isaiah 53, is the flipside ...

"But because of our sins he was wounded,
beaten because of the evil we did.

We are healed by the punishment he suffered,
made whole by the blows he received.

All of us were like sheep that were lost,
each of us going his own way.

But the LORD made the punishment fall on him,
the punishment all of us deserved." (Isaiah 53:5-6)

The prophet Micah predicted that the little town of Bethlehem would see a Redeemer born right there. (Micah 5:2) The prophet Daniel tells us the exact time that it's going to take place (Daniel 9:24-26) ...

100's of years before Jesus is born.

Zechariah predicts that one day this Redeemer will ride triumphantly into Jerusalem on the back of a colt, (Zechariah 9:9) but later be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. (Zechariah 11:12-13) Isaiah, in other portions of his prophecy, writes that this Redeemer will be executed alongside of criminals, (Isaiah 53:12)

& yet will be buried in a rich man's tomb. (Isaiah 53:9)

These are specific prophecies ... we're not talking about ... "there's gonna be a dark stranger come into your life someday."

God's plan of redemption was completely **prophesized**.

As a sidelight, this is one of the subtle proofs for me that the Scriptures are, in fact, the true Word of God.

I like to read books. (I was going to put that statement into the outline so that you'd remember it ... but I kind of assumed that might already be a given.) Anyway, I've always had certain authors that, once I've enjoyed a book or 2 ... I'll keep reading their writings.

Now the reason I like them is because I appreciate their literary style. Be it nonfiction or fiction, I like the pattern in which they develop their themes. Now as I said, each author has their own way of doing this, & it doesn't take long before we can identify them.

Now if you understand what I'm saying here ... this is exactly what's happening in the Scriptures. These prophetic patterns concerning a coming Messiah occur in most of the O.T. books. In other words, they've been written by numerous human authors ...
 over the span of 100's of years.

And yet, as we study them, it isn't long before we begin to realize that there's really only one "Author" for the entirety of Scripture ... The Holy Spirit.

We read ... "For no prophetic message ever came just from the human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God." (2 Peter 1:21)

In other words, whenever a writer like Isaiah or Daniel or Zechariah or Micah wrote their books ... it wasn't really their words. They were carried along in what they wrote by the main Author ... The Holy Spirit.

And so, as we read through Scripture we come across these patterns, these common themes because it's the same "Author" of each & every book we find in the Bible. And these patterns in Scripture **reveal** the presence of God.

Now, why God would even bother to make a list of the ancestry of Christ for us? ... (I suspect some of you might even have been wondering that very thing as I read our Scripture today. "Come on, Rande, when are we going to get to the good stuff?")

Well, Matthew records this, (& by the way, Luke also does a similar thing in his Gospel ... (Luke 3:23-38)) because the line of descendants is crucial to what God wanted to accomplish. God is carrying out His plan. He knows what He's doing.

The ancestry of Christ was intended to be a **paper trail**.

It's like that dramatic scene that we just watched a few moments ago where the postal workers pour out letter after letter on the judge's desk ... delivering it to "Santa", which proved that a higher authority had acknowledged that this man, Kris Kringle, was actually who he said he was.

Here in Matthew, we see God ... pouring out ancestor after ancestor after ancestor before us as proof that a Higher Authority was putting His stamp of approval on Jesus, acknowledging that He was who He said He was ... the prophesied Messiah, the Son of God. (Luke 24:27)

Starting with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, & going through Judah, & David, & Solomon, again & again & again, God said to each of them ...

"the Messiah was to come through you."

God's telling us ...

"This is the paper trail. This is how you'll know that the Messiah is who I said He'd be. These are His credentials. These are His papers of authenticity."

By being of the line of these descendants, God proved that Jesus was who He said He was.

And as a result, would do what He said He would do.

Now this is critically important for a # of significant reasons, but the one that I want to stress this morning is ... down through history there have been many great religious leaders:

Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, & a # of others.

During their lifetimes, they said powerful things that were meaningful to the people of their day ... & great religious movements sprang up around their teachings & personalities.

And over the years I've had people ask me ...

"Well, what makes Jesus so much better than these other great religious leaders?"

Well, one of the answers to that question is discovered right here in Matthew 1. No other founder of any other great religion has **ever** had these kinds of **credentials** before they were born.

About 500 years before Jesus was born, a man named Buddha came along, & established a religion we know as Buddhism, & many people gathered around him & tried to live by his teachings.

But before he was born, nobody ever said ... "Hey, somebody's coming, & he's going to be born in Kapilavastu, & he'll have been part of this certain family, & let me tell you about his mother. These will be his credentials.

And this is how you'll know he is who he said he is."

Mohammed was born about 540 years after Christ. He established a religion we now call Islam & many people gathered around him & tried to live by his teachings.

But before he was born, nobody ever said ... "Hey, there's a religious leader coming, & he's going to be born in Mecca, & he will have been part of this certain family, & let me tell you this about his mother. These are going to be his credentials.

And this is how you'll know he is who he said he is."

On the other hand, when Jesus came, He didn't just pop-up out of nowhere in history & say ...

"Hey, I've a great idea for a new religion!"

Long before Jesus was ever born, God put His **stamp** of **approval** on Him, so that we can know that all of the **O.T.** looked forward to the **birth** of this one little baby in Bethlehem.

And because of that one child's birth ... miracles have taken place in the lives of millions of men & women.

Missionary, Gene Dulin, tells of standing in Austria, looking at a hand carved nativity scene. It was done there in Swiss Alps, by one of those incredible wood carvers. The figures were a bit larger than life-size & was one of the most beautiful that he had ever seen.

As he stood thinking about the meaning of the nativity, a grandmother stopped with her 3-year-old grandchild. She stooped over & began talking with the little boy.

She pointed to Mary, then to Joseph, & to the baby.

Dulin says he couldn't understand her language, but he knew she was telling the story of Jesus to her grandchild.

Then Dulin added ... "For 2000 years parents & grandparents have passed on the story of Jesus.

It has changed millions of lives & the whole world."

That's the gift of the baby.

Being a follower of Jesus starts with faith in an all-wise, loving God, who is working out His plan & purposes among US. (Romans 8:28)

Christian apologist, Norman Geisler (X) writes ...
 "God is not asking you to take a blind leap of faith into the darkness. He's asking you to take a reasonable step of faith into the light."

To believe in the "Miracle On 34th St." is more like a blind leap of faith. But to believe in the miracle of the virgin birth, the atoning death, & bodily resurrection is a reasonable step of faith into the light.

And that's what we're called to do.

If people would just read this Book for themselves, & ponder it for a moment. What does it mean that dozens & dozens & dozens ... maybe even 353 ... prophecies, spoken 100's of years before He arrived ... were all fulfilled specifically by Jesus Christ?

They not only tells us something about the power of God ... but also about His heart. Our Creator was so consumed with having a relationship with us that He wanted to become one of us, so far so that He stooped about as low as possible by entering this world by means of a stable.

The miracle of the incarnation demonstrates that our powerful God is so concerned about us that He became small. He reduced Himself to a tiny cell implanted inside a virgin's womb.

He snuck into the world He created almost unnoticed.

And not only was He born for our sake, but He also died for our sake ... to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And all of this happened as a result of the miracle on a small side street in Bethlehem.

(X) "To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see."

(Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is not naively trusting in the impossible; it's wisely trusting in the invisible. God has given plenty of evidence to believe. It's not indisputable evidence, or else no faith would be needed. But it's sufficient evidence to convince me that Christ came to save me.

Please don't forget there is a great deal of truth that we will never fully understand with our 3 pounds of gray matter. God is far bigger than the universe and Christmas tells us that God who created the entire universe came to us in the form of an infant to show us love and grace and mercy. God knows your name and your story and you belong to him. If you will simply trust in him and in that truth that hope will overflow in your life.

MARANA THA

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