

DEVOTIONS *for* LENT

PLACES
of the
PASSION



REED LESSING

ASH WEDNESDAY

It's All About Jesus

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. **MATTHEW 1:1**

Jesus never wrote a book, and yet millions of books have been written about him. Jesus never painted a picture, and yet the world's greatest art has Jesus as its inspiration. Jesus never traveled far from his birthplace, and yet his name has gone to the ends of the earth. Jesus only had a handful of followers, and yet today over 30% of the world's population follows him.

To know Jesus is to trust Jesus; to trust Jesus is to love Jesus; to love Jesus is to follow Jesus. This Ash Wednesday we begin a series of devotions on Matthew's gospel. Matthew writes his gospel so we can know Jesus.

Jesus, let Matthew show me your might and mercy. Amen.

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THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

## The Son of David

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David.* **MATTHEW 1:1**

Sometimes politicians make crazy promises. In 2004, John Edwards said, "We will stop diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's." In 2012, Newt Gingrich said, "By 2020, we will put a colony on the moon." In 2012, Michelle Bachman said, "I will pull American troops out of Libya and out of Africa." However, when we look at Jesus, we see a completely different kind of leader. He is David's son. He is the fulfillment of God's promise to save us. He is the Messiah or Christ.

*Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which means "anointed one." As David's Son and God's Messiah, Jesus comes to teach and preach, suffer and die—all so we may love and trust him all our days. What a wonderful King!

**Jesus, rule and reign over my life. Amen.**

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

## The Compassionate King

... by Tamar ... by Rahab ... by Ruth ... by the wife of Uriah. **MATTHEW 1:3-6**

Matthew 1:1-17 reads much like a telephone book. Back in the dark ages, you'd actually have to look up someone's phone number in a book. That's what Matthew 1:1-17 sounds like—a big, fat, dull, dry telephone book!

Yesterday we saw that Jesus is David's Son—a King. Today we marvel that Jesus is a compassionate King. Christ doesn't come to drive out enemies. He comes to bring in outcasts.

In the ancient world, people traced their ancestry through their fathers. It comes as no surprise, then, that Matthew's genealogy is predominantly male. However, do you see that Matthew also mentions four women? They aren't the sweethearts and darlings of the Old Testament like Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel. No. They are outcasts named Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. These women are all Gentiles!

The Jews expected a Messiah who would drive out their Roman oppressors and crush the Gentiles. Jesus doesn't drive out enemies. Jesus welcomes outcasts. Jesus welcomes you.

**Jesus, thank you for welcoming me into your kingdom. Amen.**

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SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

## A Rejected King with All Authority

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

**MATTHEW 1:1**

Do you see what Matthew does? He places David before Abraham. David lived one thousand years after Abraham. What gives? Matthew places David before

everyone in Christ's genealogy to announce that Christ is King—the King.

But Jewish elites rejected Jesus. They thought he was the wrong kind of King. He associated with the wrong kind of people, preached the wrong kind of message and carried out the wrong kind of mission. The whole thing came to a head on Good Friday.

“Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Matthew 27:37). After Golgotha, there was Galilee, where Christ showed himself alive! Then he said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18).

That's what we would expect of a King—to have all authority. Our King Jesus makes demands of us. But before he makes demands of us, he gives everything for us. That's a king worth following all our days!

**Jesus, I will follow you—always! Amen.**

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FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

## The Son of Abraham

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

**MATTHEW 1:1**

“Who is Jesus?” That's the most important question we can ever ask. Just who is Jesus? Matthew says that Jesus is the son of Abraham. Who is the most famous son of Abraham? Isaac. Isaac is the son of sacrifice. So is Jesus—even more so.

Just like Isaac, Jesus willingly took wood and marched up a mount—not Mt. Moriah—but Mt. Calvary. Yet, unlike Isaac, Jesus had no substitute ram. Arrested abruptly. Tried unjustly. Sentenced callously. Mocked repeatedly. Abandoned ruthlessly. Beaten brutally. Crucified barbarously. But risen triumphantly! Christ is alive, never to die again.

After Isaac was miraculously spared, Abraham didn't call the mountain “Mt. Impossible” or “Mt. Disaster” or “Mt. I-Didn't-Ever-Think-I'd-Make-It.” Abraham calls the mountain “The LORD Will Provide.” How do *we* know God provides for us? The son of Abraham. His name is Jesus.

**Praise to you, Jesus, for being the Son of Sacrifice. Amen.**

MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## The Son of Solomon

*And David was the father of Solomon. MATTHEW 1:7*

Let's rank what Americans have difficulty finishing. Number one: diets. Number two: exercise regimens. Number three: saving money. What's my point? It's easy as pie to begin. It's tougher than nails to finish.

Let's face it: we all have unfinished business. Yet whatever it is that we want to finish, help is on the way! Jesus is the Son of Solomon.

Solomon began strong. When his father David died, rivals to the throne included his half-brothers Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah. Solomon had all three eliminated—with the greatest of ease. Anointed at the Gihon Spring by the high priest Zakok as Israel's third king, Solomon came out of the starting blocks running like a greyhound after jackrabbits. It's easy as pie to begin. With time, though, it became difficult for Solomon to finish. Much of his later life became one huge mess.

Christ says, "Something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). Jesus not only begins strong. Jesus finishes strong. For who? You! And for Jesus it was tougher than nails.

**Jesus, you took the nails for me; I will finish strong for you. Amen.**

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TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## Who Is Jesus?

*All the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. MATTHEW 1:17*

Who is Jesus? Some say Jesus is a spiritual guru who says, "Imagine a world without religion and remember all you need is love." Others say Jesus is a revo-

lutionary who teaches us to rebel against the status quo and blame everything on “the system.”

Who is Jesus? Matthew’s genealogy answers that question. Matthew summarizes biblical history in three sets of fourteens—or six sevens. That’s not a complete story. There must be another seven—a seventh seven. This is a story that lacks an ending. That’s Matthew’s point.

Jesus brings the biblical story to completion. Jesus ushers in the final stage in God’s plan of salvation. Jesus also brings our story to completion. This is great news because we all know something is missing. We all know that there has to be more to life than jobs, bills and vacations. Jesus completes our lives. Jesus is our Seventh Seven!

**Jesus, your life and love complete me—forevermore. Amen.**

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WEDNESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## His Name Is Jesus

*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,  
for he will save his people from their sins. MATTHEW 1:21*

Mary conceives Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Joseph is hesitant to believe it. We can’t blame him! So God sends an angel who speaks to Joseph in a dream. Joseph is convinced. He believes the unbelievable.

Joseph and Mary live together and share a home. This certainly raised some eyebrows in their hometown of Nazareth. Busybodies stood on the street corner, assuming that Joseph and Mary conceived the child during their engagement instead of waiting to be married. “What nerve, those two!” This sort of gossip traveled quickly.

The angel also tells Joseph the child’s name: Jesus. Jesus is the English form of the Hebrew name Joshua. Joshua means “Yahweh (the LORD) saves.” The child’s name is Joshua—or Jesus—because this Son will save his people from their sins. Jesus will forgive all sin, for all people, for all time—lock, stock and barrel!

And we need it! O God, we all need it!

**All praise to you, Jesus, for you take away the sin of the world. Amen.**

THURSDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## Immanuel

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). MATTHEW 1:23*

“God with us” is the theme of Matthew’s gospel. The promise appears in the beginning: Matthew 1:23. Then in the middle: Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three gather in my name, there I am in their midst.” Then at the end: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus, the Son of Mary, is Immanuel—God with us. Jesus is God, up close and personal. He enters our muck and mire, our chaos and our deep confusion.

We see it most profoundly on the day of deepest darkness. On that day we all grabbed hold of Immanuel, nailed him to a cross and cried out, “Leave us alone!” To this day, our every sin demands just that—for God to leave us alone forever. On the other side of Good Friday, though, Immanuel lives! There was the cradle and there was the cross. But, conquering death, Immanuel now wears a golden, kingly crown!

**This day, Jesus, be my Immanuel through thick and thin, darkness and light. Amen.**

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FRIDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Herod or Jesus?

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. MATTHEW 2:1

Sunday school teacher Brenda Roberts of Stone Mountain, Georgia, was teaching Matthew to her class. “What do we call the wise men?” she asked. “The three magics,” replied a five-year-old. “What gifts did the magi bring to Jesus?” she asked. The same five-year-old responded, “Gold, Frankensteins and Smurfs.”

Matthew 2 doesn’t have any magics or Smurfs, but it does have a

FOLLOW THE ENTIRE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW WITH AN EYE TOWARD THE PLACES OF THE PASSION, where Jesus is headed to suffer, die and rise again for our salvation. In these devotions for Lent, written by theology professor Reed Lessing, readers begin to see how every place Jesus goes along his path to the cross hints at his ultimate mission to take our place for our redemption so that we might have a place in heaven with him forever.



This book, along with many other *Creative Communications for the Parish* products, is available on [amazonkindle](#) and [nook](#)

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