

“WORLD SAVIOR.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

December 25, 2016, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Matthew 1:1-6; Luke 2:10-11; I John 4:14

Introduction.

How is the Gospel of Matthew like Lynden, WA? It starts with a drive through a cemetery. Matthew begins the Christmas story with a cemetery tour that visits the gravesites of 47 relatives of Jesus.

Jesus was the only person in history who got to choose His relatives. And some of His choices are about as hard to explain as Mary's pregnancy. Notice who some of Jesus' relatives were.

Matthew starts with Abraham who was from Iraq, from the idolatrous people of Mesopotamia. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all got their wives from Iraq.

Tamar (vs. 3) was a Canaanite who had to turn to prostitution to trick Judah into doing what was right. Rahab (vs. 5) was a Canaanite and well-known prostitute from the cursed city of Jericho.

Ruth (vs. 5) was from Moab east of Israel in modern Jordan. Moabites were a race of cursed people born out of incest between Lot and his daughters.

Bathsheba (vs. 6) was married to a Hittite and might have been one as well. The Hittites lived in what is modern Turkey.

A whole host of foreigners and sinners. Jesus took His blood from the world and shed that blood for the whole world. Jesus is the only World Savior.

The first people to worship Jesus were the shepherds who represent the people of Israel. Jesus came to the Jews first.

In the temple on the eighth day old Simeon who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel saw Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit announced:

Luke 2:30-32 My eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

The second people to worship Jesus were some wisemen who represent the Arab world, Gentiles, those who are yet far off, from afar. They brought gifts that could

sustain a poor couple for quite a while. Why would they need those kinds of gifts? Because Herod started killing the babies.

Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt. Jesus became an undocumented, illegal alien, a refugee in Egypt. This was the second time God sent refugees to Egypt and the second time He called His people out of Egypt.

The Christmas story is a world story, it touches all cultures and all peoples, all sinners from all walks of life. The Christmas story is completely contemporary touching issues that are very relevant today. It's a story filled with foreigners, immigrants, illegal aliens, sexual sinners.

We of European descent tend to think more highly of our kind and less so of other races. But Europeans from Rome tried to kill Jesus, Africans in Egypt offered Jesus hospitality. Later it would be some other Africans who would offer Jesus the use of an Upper Room and another African who would help carry His cross (Simon of Cyrene, Libya) while it was the Europeans who pounded the nails.

When God set out to make a people for Himself, He started with a dark skinned Iraqi from the Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham.

Later God sent Jonah back to that same region to the most violent people on earth and they repented when they heard his message. God sent all His people Israel to be exiled in the most violent nation on earth, Babylon. And through Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar was converted.

God has called His people and His Church out of violent cultures and violent cities with violent rulers. Nineveh was the Nazis of their day. ISIS is just Nineveh 2.0.

God has been working in those kinds of places for thousands of years. God sends His message of truth and love to the worst of the worst, which is really good news for you and me.

We owe our faith and our lives to people who dress different and speak different and eat different and look different than us.

Refugees are one of God's ways of doing missions and one of God's ways of turning us into missionaries. If we won't go to the mission field, He will bring the mission field to us.

Incarnation and Pentecost.

After God sent His Son to be a World Savior with the world's blood flowing in His veins, He sent His Holy Spirit, to be a World Spirit.

Acts 2 and Pentecost reminds us of Matthew 1, only this time the names are nations and peoples.

Acts 2:5, 9-11 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, *devout men from every nation under heaven*. . . . 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Fifteen nations hearing the Word of God in their own tongue and three thousand of them believed on that day.

Dr. Raymond Bakke lives down in Acme. He founded International Urban Associates (IUA) and serves as Chancellor, and professor of global urban ministry at Bakke Graduate University of Ministry. Ray is the author of a number of books.

Several years ago he went to Iraq to appeal for the release of two Americans being held there. He met with Muhammed al-saeed Sahaf, Secretary of State, of Iraq.

Before he made his appeal he asked Sahaf, “Your excellency, may I tell you how important your country is to Christians? It is to us a holy land and the fatherland of Christianity.”

Bakke told him when God wanted to save the human race, He started with an Iraqi Abraham. Later Moses learned the wisdom of Egypt some of which came from even more ancient wisdom from Iraq, some of which is preserved in the Code of Hammurabi and can be seen in the Louvre in Paris.

Two books in our Bible come from Iraq, Jonah's prophecy about Nineveh and Daniel's history and prophecy from Iraq.

From those two books we learn that God is God and God can do anything He wants. Through Jonah God said the sins of the worst and most violent people on earth could repent and be forgiven. Through Daniel terrible tyrants like Nebuchadnezzar could be humbled and brought to repentance, and confess God as the one true God and Savior.

Dr. Bakke went on to tell the Secretary of State that the first missionary to China came from just north of Baghdad in 600 AD. Alopen of Nestoria.

God is the creator of the world and Jesus is the Savior of the world. He cares about and is invested in and will be worshiped by all nations, tribes, tongues and peoples.

Jesus is the world's Savior, not only because He came to earth as the God Man, and not only because the world's blood was in His veins, but also because by His death and resurrection He overcame and defeated the principalities and powers of that had previously been in power in the world.

Colossians 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

He overcame the principalities and powers of this world, and He overcame the sins of the world.

John 1:29 Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

He didn't try to appease the Father's wrath against sin, He turned it aside. Jesus didn't come to try to save the world, He came to save it. He didn't come to offer to take away the sins of the world, He took away the sins of the world.

How far does that blessing spread? As far as the curse is found, into every nation. The wonder of His love is that it can be received by those cursed by the worst sin.

Moabites were a cursed and idolatrous people, yet God redeemed Ruth. We are Ruth, we were under a curse. We were strangers to the covenant without an inheritance and desperately needing a redeemer. God in His grace sends us a redeemer who delivers us from the curse by His amazing grace at the cost of His own blood.

Next time you drive into Lynden think of how Matthew starts the Christmas story, consider how Jesus is Savior of both sides, of the Dutch and the non-Dutch, of the Dutch and the Gentiles.

Jesus' ancestry calls us to let go of racial prejudice or ethnic pride and cross the line in reaching out to someone different than us, especially the stranger, the alien, the refugee in our midst. Jesus emptied Himself and came to embrace a family with a very mixed past, a Canaanite Tamar and Rahab, a Moabite Ruth, the wife of Uriah the Hittite and Jesus a Jew.

Christianity is not a religion for good people. It's not for people who are better than everyone else. It's for sinners at their worst.

1 Peter 3:18 Christ ... died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

The Christmas story is not just a Jewish story nor has it become just a European or white people story, it is a universal story, a story of the advent of grace for all people of all races in all places, even for refugees and immigrants and violent nations.

Jesus is not just a local God or a racial God, not just God of Israel or of America, but God of the nations, He is Lord of lords, King of kings, God most high over everything.

Isaiah 60:1, 3 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 3 And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Let your light shine all over the world for our Savior is a World Savior.

Conclusion.

In closing let me paraphrase the words of the great preacher, Charles Spurgeon on December 24, 1854:

Now is the time to go to our houses for feasting. Go and enjoy and celebrate your Savior's birth. Feast, Christians, feast. Be glad, you have a right to be very happy. In the words of Solomon,
"Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart."

The birth of Jesus deserves a worldwide celebration because He is a World Savior.

Let your faith give you great joy, for to us a child has been born, a Son has been given and He is Jesus Christ the Lord, the Savior of the world. Glory to God and Amen.