

“The House of David”

Luke 1:26-33; 2:1-20

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Over and over again, as we re-tell the Christmas story each year, we hear about a certain man named David. “A man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David” ... “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife” ... “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David” ... “he has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David” ... “to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David” ... “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord” ... If you were hearing the Christmas story for the very first time, you might find yourself wondering, “Who is this David, and why is he important in this story?”

One answer is fairly obvious. Joseph, the husband of Mary, is a descendant of this David. David had lived in the village of Bethlehem, which is about six miles south of Jerusalem. When Emperor Augustus ordered a census, Luke tells us, everyone had to go to their family’s hometown to be counted. So Joseph and Mary, who were living in Nazareth (up north), had to go to Joseph’s family’s hometown of Bethlehem (down south). That’s why Jesus ended up being born in Bethlehem instead of in Nazareth.

That’s fairly straightforward, and it answers the question, at least on a superficial level. But there is a deeper answer to the question, an answer that goes beyond *geography* and gets to the heart of *why it matters* that Joseph was descended from David. There are three things you need to know:

Number one: *David was a shepherd boy who became a skilled musician, a mighty warrior, and a great king.* David’s story is told at length in the books of First and Second Samuel in the Old Testament. When we meet him he is a boy, the youngest of eight sons, out in the fields, keeping his father’s sheep. Because of his skill with the lyre, he is brought to the court of Israel’s King Saul, who suffers from fits of madness, for Saul’s servants had discerned that the king’s madness abates when he has beautiful music to listen to. Saul’s servants could have picked *any musician in the country* – and they chose young David. When Saul’s army fights against the mighty Philistines, David demonstrates his martial prowess by killing the giant Goliath with a slingshot. Saul puts David in charge of Saul’s entire army, but David becomes so immensely popular that mad King Saul plots to kill him, and David has to flee. Eventually Saul is killed in battle. Saul’s son succeeds his father, but he only lasts two years before he dies. The elders of Israel then appoint David as Israel’s new king, for David is by this point a trusted and proven leader. He conquers the city of Jerusalem and makes it the capital. He brings the Ark of the Covenant into the city. Then he defeats many of the surrounding countries – the Philistines, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Amalekites, the Ammonites – thus securing Israel’s peace, and expanding its borders. So David rose to a position of power, which he managed well. He was widely respected. Israel flourished.

Number two: *David committed a very great sin, but he made a heartfelt confession and a*

genuine repentance. Up to this point in the story, David has hardly made any mistakes, and he has no discernable flaws. He is an *ideal* young king. But then, in a moment of weakness, he sees a beautiful woman bathing, has her brought to him, and commits adultery with her. When she becomes pregnant, he tries to cover up his misdeed by having her husband – an elite soldier in David’s army – come home to spend a night with his wife, but when he declines, David arranges to have him killed. David then marries the grieving widow. It’s a classic case of a person who rises to power amid the accolades of many fans and admirers, who loses sight of his calling, who falls prey to temptation, and who betrays the public trust. We hear of people like this all the time. Often, people’s careers do not recover; often, people continue trying to deny that they did anything wrong; often, people try to hide behind their achievements and refuse to acknowledge the hurt and the harm that they caused. Here is where David differs from so many other leaders who fall. *David realized that what he had done was a great sin against God.* He confesses: “I have sinned against the Lord.” He falls to his knees in prayer. “Have mercy on me, O God ... wash me thoroughly from my iniquity ... cleanse me from my sin.... Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.” He confesses his sin, without making any excuses for his lack of good judgment, without trying to hide or distort any of the facts, without trying to pass blame off onto anybody else. He is fully prepared to accept God’s judgment, whatever that judgment may be. *This is a model of true repentance.* When we slip up – and who doesn’t? – David is a model we can look to for guidance and inspiration. *David recognizes his evil for the evil it truly is.* That is an *essential* act for *anybody* who claims to believe in God. There’s no showmanship here; there’s no pretense; there’s just genuine humility, and regret, and a tremendous acknowledgement of the harm he has caused to many people. The world certainly doesn’t need more sin – but the world *definitely* needs more repentance. The world needs more leaders like David. Everybody makes mistakes. David was man enough *recognize* his mistakes. *Admit* them. *Confess* them. And *pray* – earnestly *pray* – for God’s forgiveness.

Number three: *David’s earthly kingdom falters – but God promises that David’s kingdom will last forever.* Things get tough for David after that whole affair. The child that was conceived in adultery gets sick and dies. There is incest, rape, and murder, among David’s other children. One of David’s sons launches a full-scale rebellion against his father. For a time, David is forced to flee from the city of Jerusalem. Eventually the rebellious son is killed by David’s general. The rebellion ends, but David is left to grieve – yet again. Later, when David is on his deathbed, another of David’s sons tries to claim the throne. David eventually dies at the age of 70, after ruling Israel for 40 years. The kingdom passes to his son Solomon. When Solomon dies, the kingdom splits in two. The northern kingdom eventually falls to an invading army from Assyria; the southern kingdom eventually falls to an invading army from Babylon; David’s earthly kingdom comes to an end. *But* – and this is a big “but” – the *hope* of David’s kingdom lives on. A faithful prophet named Nathan had given David a very clear word from the Lord: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” But how can David’s house, David’s kingdom, David’s throne continue, when they’ve all been thrown down? The northern part of the kingdom falls in 722 BC; the southern part of the kingdom falls in 587 BC; *and the Jews live on*, in exile, far from their home. They read the promise that God had given to David, the promise of an *everlasting* kingdom. They wonder: *how can this be?* They search the scriptures; they find other verses like that one, verses that speak of a righteous King that will come, in the line of David:

- “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the

land.” (Jeremiah 23:5)

- “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” (Isaiah 11:1)
- “A child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7)
- “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” (Micah 5:2)
- “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)
- “I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14)

I could go on and on; there are *dozens* of passages like this in the Old Testament, passages that the Jews living in exile read and studied and interpreted. They began to understand that *God was going to send them a new king*, in the line of King David. David’s earthly kingdom may have ended, but his *line*, his *lineage*, endured. Someday, in God’s own time, there would come a *new king*, a *great king*, a king like David himself had been; strong, mighty, and victorious; trusted and respected; a king that would liberate them from the foreign powers that were holding the Jews in subjugation; a king with all of David’s strengths and none of David’s flaws; a king that would truly bring *justice* to the nations. This king would stand in the line of King David; this king, so Micah said, would come from Bethlehem itself, King David’s own hometown. This king would be *anointed* by God to fulfill his destiny. The Hebrew word for “anoint” is *mashach*; the Greek word is *chrio*; in Hebrew, the “anointed one” is *Mashiach*; in Greek, it is *Christos*. The Jews began to look forward to the coming of the *Messiah* ... the coming of the *Christ*.

They got a lot of that right. The biggest detail they got wrong was they thought the Messiah would inaugurate a new kingdom *on earth*. They did not envision that the Messiah’s kingdom would be a *heavenly* kingdom. They anticipated a “King of the Jews.” They didn’t anticipate a *savior of the world*.

So why is David important in the Christmas story? It’s not just that Joseph was descended from David. It’s not just that Jesus was born in David’s hometown of Bethlehem. It’s that *Jesus was the complete fulfillment of all the promises that God had ever made about the promised Messiah who was to come in the line of King David*. David wasn’t just a *name from the past*. David was a name upon which was pinned all the hope for the *future*. It was a name that was attached to a *whole heap of promises* – a whole heap of promises about the *good* that God would bring, in God’s own time. One of the titles for Jesus is “Son of David.” You can find that phrase a couple dozen times in the gospels, referring to Jesus. It’s a code word. It means: *This* is the guy that the scriptures spoke about in all those different places. *This* is the king that God promised all those centuries ago. *This* is the *Messiah*, the Anointed One of God.

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