Advent 2011
Mysterious Beginnngs
Matthew 1:1-25
Sermon Outline

Introduction: During an election year our perennial and universal quest for a leader we can depend on rises to the surface for many. Matthew says Jesus is that leader, and gives us at least four reasons for depending on him: (1) He has the right pedigree; (2) He has a comforting pedigree; (3) He is deeply invested in us; and (4) He has dealt with our deepest problem.

I)   Jesus has the right pedigree
A) v. 1: *...son of David, son of Abraham*

B) Meaning for us
Jesus is more than the embodiment of good ideas

II)   Jesus has a comforting pedigree
A) Ancestral solidarity with all sorts
Abraham, David, Josiah
But also...*Manasseh, Bathsheba, Jechoniah, Tamar, Ruth, Rahab*

B) Meaning for us
"Jesus is my kind of people!"

Do you qualify for Jesus and his movement?

III)   Jesus is deeply invested in people
A) Astonishing conception and birth

B) The flap about the virgin birth
- Disqualifies Jesus as the son of David
- Matthew stretched Isaiah's meaning in Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23)
- The virgin birth is scientifically impossible
- Just one more legend about gods consorting with humans

All these complaints are absurd and thankless nit-picking

C) What the virgin birth means
- God is with us, as us
- God is with us particularly
- God is in us

IV)   Jesus has dealt with our deepest problem
v. 21: You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.
"Cheer up! It's worse than you think" (Jack Miller)

Questions for Reflection this Week

1) Why does Matthew begin his Gospel with a genealogy? How does this beginning speak to Ghandi's comment: "It would not matter to me if it could be proven that Jesus of Nazareth never existed; for the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me."? How does what Ghandi is looking for different from what Matthew is looking for? Which of those two quests (Ghandi's or Matthew's) best describes your own? Why?

2) Note that Jesus' ancestral tree includes Abraham, David, Manasseh (see 2 Chronicles 33:1-9), Jechoniah (or, Jehoiachin—see 2 Kings 24:8-17), David's wife (name not mentioned), Tamar (Genesis 38), Ruth, and Rahab.   Categorize each of these people. What does the list tell us?

3) How according to Matthew was Jesus conceived? What do you think of this? How do you respond to the statement, "The virgin birth is scientifically impossible."

4) Some have said that Matthew's account of Jesus' conception belongs to a series of ancient legends all made up and designed to make us think highly of the particular child in question. One such legend tells us that Alexander the Great was conceived through the union of his mother Olympias (Philip of Macedonia's wife) and Zeus (who descended and had intercourse with her in the form of a serpent). Compare the two stories. How are they similar? How are they different? What do you make of the argument that Matthew made up his story to make Jesus important to his readers?

5) According to Matthew (quoting Isaiah), Jesus is "Emmanuel--God with us." What do the virgin birth and the story that followed tell us about the new and searching meaning of this name?

6) Many Jews in Jesus' day were looking for a messiah who would deliver them from their political enemies. What, according to Matthew 1:21, is Jesus' mission? How does it differ from Jewish expectation and what evidence exists from Israel's history up to that point that Jesus' actual mission (rather than the expected one) was the necessary one?

7) Reflect on the following: "The drama of God's coming to us in Jesus is designed to motivate us to stop hiding from the truth about ourselves and to stop trying to fix ourselves. Instead we need to hear Jesus say, 'Cheer up! It's worse than you think. That's why I came! But thank God that I did come to make all things well, including you. I came to die for you, to pay for your sin fully so that you could finally face it and, with my help, deal with it.'"