

18 December 2024

[Jer 23, 5-8; Mat 1, 18-24](#)

Homily

In this account from Matthew, which continues the text read yesterday, the title ' *Son of David* ' is given to both Joseph and Jesus. This underlines the profoundly human nature of God's intervention in history. The Son of God did not become incarnate in the abstract. He became man - a concrete man - born at a particular moment in human history, into a particular people and a particular family. This particular environment shaped him, gave him the categories of thought and language that enabled him to speak to us using a very specific set of images and concepts.

His mission was fulfilled in a very ordinary human life. A child was born of a woman. A very young woman. If Mary was betrothed at the usual age in her society, i.e. at the onset of puberty, she must have been between 12 and 14 years old when she gave birth to Jesus. According to the same customs, Joseph must have been between 13 and 15 - not the bearded old man of so many artistic representations. This child grew up to become an adult. He practised his father's trade. One day he felt the prophetic call and preached the good news in the towns and villages. The authorities found him an embarrassment and got rid of him as they had done with so many others. There is nothing really extraordinary in all this. The same thing, including death, had happened to many others. But it was through this ordinary human existence that the course of history was profoundly changed and salvation was achieved.

Matthew, in today's Gospel, like Paul in his letter to the Romans, and John in his Prologue, want to show that this son of Israel was more than just a son of Israel. He was not simply a pious Jew sent to the Jewish people. He was *Emmanuel*, the *God-with-us*, for every human being and every race. When Matthew tells us about the virgin birth, what he wants to emphasise is not so much a miraculous event as the fact that Jesus was much more than a child of Israel. Yes, he was a Jew by birth. Yes, his ancestors were Jews. But his real father was God, who through him, as through Adam, gave birth to a new race, one in which blood ties were of little importance.

Joseph's role in this story is a kind of symbolic expression of the disappointment of the Jewish people when they discovered that the Messiah was not their exclusive property. The birth of Jesus put an end to the domination of one race over another, of one culture over another. Since Jesus, whatever our political citizenship, whether we

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belong to a tiny country or a powerful state, we are all sons and daughters of God.

Another consequence of all this is that God is not simply 'our' God and Jesus is not simply 'our' Jesus. We're used to seeing Jesus as 'ours'; and, of course, since we're generous, we want to share him with others! In reality, we don't have to 'share' him with others. We have to 'discover' Him in others. No one -- not Joseph, not ourselves -- can claim to be the father of Jesus.

This is absolutely new and original. So why are we Christians? Precisely for this purpose: to bear witness to the absolute equality of all human beings; to help humanity to discover at last that no one can, for any reason, dominate another person, whether in the military and political order or in the order of religion.

In the name of Jesus, ' *Emmanuel* " or " *God-with-us* ', the " **us** ' refers to all of us, whoever we are, without exception.

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