

The Hope that Takes Root

Matthew 1, Isaiah 11:1-10, Romans 13:11-14

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Advent 1: November 20, 2025

On this first Sunday of Advent, the church begins again. Every year, we circle back to this season not because we've forgotten the story, but because we need to hear it fresh—spoken into the particular fears, uncertainties, and longings of *this* moment. The cry of Advent, "Come, Lord Jesus, come" reminds us that we live in the in-between times. The Savior has come, but the kingdom is not yet here in all its fullness. Jesus will come again to complete the healing of all creation.

As we begin a new liturgical year, we also begin a year of listening to the Gospel. The lectionary readings move us through three years that focus on the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This year is of Matthew, the gospel that anchors the story of Jesus deeply in the history, hopes, and wounds of God's people.

Open up to the pew Bibles - page 1, but for the second time. A little to the left of half, then half again.

- Word for father can also mean ancestor, and we see that sometimes more than one generation is included.
- RSV gives us three paragraphs: Abraham to David, David to exile, exile to Jesus.
- Read 1:1-6, 12, 16

Matthew introduces Jesus not with angels or shepherds or a manger—but with a genealogy. A long list of names, some familiar and others we can barely pronounce. At first glance it feels like the sort of passage we might skip over, but for Matthew, this is the opening proclamation of the good news: Jesus belongs to a people. Jesus comes from a story. Jesus is the long-awaited heir of Abraham and David, the fulfillment of promises handed down through generations, through triumph and failure, through exile and return. Matthew's genealogy is not a sterile record—it is the declaration that hope has a lineage. God has been at work for a very long time.

Matthew's inclusion of four particular women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba) reveals his concern to do more than relay historical data. These women raise both ethnic and ethical questions. At least two of them were not Israelites by birth and all four of them had reputations that could have made them unmentionable in an ancestral tree.... Jesus' genealogy makes it clear, not that there were a few disreputable people in his family, but...God sent his Son as Savior of all people - Jews, Gentiles, men, women..." sinners and saints. (NLT parallel study Bible 1734)

And for the Jewish audience to whom Matthew writes, this was one of the most interesting ways to start. A person's family line proved his or her standing as one of God's chosen people. And Matthew is careful to show that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, the father of all Jews, as well as a direct descendant of David, thus fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

We think Advent of four weeks is too long to wait for the Messiah, yet Jews have held the hope of a Messiah for 400 years without a new word from a prophet. Matthew's genealogy impresses on its first readers, and us, that God has been at work, even when the people could not see it.

That is exactly what Isaiah is trying to remind his people during a time when hope was in short supply. Judah was facing political collapse. The royal line of David, once a mighty tree, looked cut down to a lifeless stump. But Isaiah speaks a different word: *"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse."* Hope, Isaiah says, does not come from our strength, but from God's surprising ability to bring life where none seems possible. The Spirit-filled ruler Isaiah describes—a king of justice, equity, and peace—is one Israel cannot yet see, but whom God is already preparing.

Isaiah's prophecies give shape to the kingdom Christ inaugurates, and the one to which we await its fulfillment at his coming again.

- Justice to the poor
- Fair decisions for the exploited
- Destruction of the wicked
- Safety for little ones, and salvation for all the world.

It is the hope of Advent. Christ has come, Christ is coming, Christ will come again. We who have been called into his kingdom reign are witnesses to the light that shines in the darkness.

And then we turn to Paul in Romans 13, calling believers to wake up because salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Paul is not asking Christians to generate hope through sheer optimism or moral effort; he is urging them to live as if God's future is already taking shape. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," he says—live in the daylight of God's promised kingdom, even if the world around you still feels like night.

Isaiah imagines hope taking root. Paul imagines hope waking us up. Matthew imagines hope woven through generations. Together, these texts remind us that Advent hope is not naïve. It is not the denial of reality. It is the quiet, steady conviction that God is

already at work— sometimes beneath the surface, sometimes in ways we cannot yet see—bringing about new life, new possibility, new peace.

As we follow the Gospel of Matthew this year through the lectionary, we will hear story after story of Jesus fulfilling God's promises: healing the broken, teaching the crowds, challenging the powerful, and revealing a kingdom that turns the world upside down. Matthew will show us a Messiah who is both deeply rooted in Israel's history and astonishingly unexpected—one who brings hope not only to the righteous but to the outcast, the Gentile, and the sinner.

Advent is not just about waiting for Christmas; it is about learning to recognize that hopeful shoot of new life in our own lives and in our world. It is about trusting that God is faithful to promises we may not yet fully understand. It is about daring to believe, even in anxious or weary times, that God's future is already pushing up through the soil.

So today, as we begin this season, as we light the candle of Hope. Not because everything is as it should be, but because we believe in the God who brings life from stumps, who wakes us from sleep, and who works in the world through generations - rooting salvation in the real, messy, human story God refuses to abandon.

May this Advent open our eyes to the quiet, persistent hope God is growing among us—and may we be ready to follow that hope as Matthew leads us to the Christ who is coming, and who is already here. Amen.