



**Mennonite  
Church  
Canada**

Resource Centre

# From our Churches

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*Scripture: Matthew 1*

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## **Matthew 1: A Genealogy of Grace**

Inspired and borrowed from a sermon by Fred Craddock "God is with us" and an article by Gail Goodwin, "Genealogy and Grace."

**Cast:** Narrator:  
Joseph:  
Leah:  
Judah:  
Rahab:  
Ruth:  
David:  
Josiah:  
Scripture Reader:

**Choir:** Gentle Breezes of Judea  
The Winter Rose

**Carols:** What Child is this?  
Twas in the moon of Wintertime  
Lo, how a Rose  
O Little Town of Bethlehem  
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing  
Angels we have heard on high  
Silent Night, holy night

**Choir** "Gentle Breezes of Judea"

**Prayer/Welcome**

**Choir** "The Winter Rose

*(The scene begins with Joseph pacing around outside the stable... occasionally peering in... acting as a very nervous new father...)*

Leah: *(Walking in, looking relieved)* Joseph! So you did make it here to Bethlehem. We were worried, with Mary being ready to deliver.

Jo: Oh, hi Leah. I am so nervous. Look at this, we are in a stable, with animals... and it's cold out here. And this is our first child.

Leah: You talk about it as if it is all up to you. My parents told me everything: the angel coming to visit Mary; the angel coming to visit you when you were thinking of running away. It seems to me that things are in good hands.

Jo: It is still hard not to be nervous though.

Leah: Yeah, I guess. *(Pause)* Hey.... let's take a walk. There is nothing you can do here anyway. Let's go for a walk. The others are in there to help her.

Jo: Go for a walk? I have been walking for days! I don't feel like walking. Besides, where would we go?

Leah: Come on... we won't go far. Let's just go across the street. We can walk through the family cemetery.

Jo: *(appalled)* That's a terrible idea. Taking a walk in the cemetery.

Leah: Walking in the family cemetery is not a terrible idea. My mother says that it is a history lesson every time you do it.

Jo: But.... it's night, it's dark.

Leah: *(pointing)* Uh... the star *(Joseph sighs)*

*(Walk over near the piano... scanning the floor as if looking at grave stones)*

Leah: I'm not sure I know my way around here.

Jo: The oldest headstones are probably over here somewhere..... *(Looking)* Yeah, sure enough, here is Abraham... and there is Isaac.... and there is Jacob. The big three. It takes the whole book of Genesis to tell their story. Such a proud history.

Leah: *(Wondering)* I don't know if I would use the word proud.

Jo: Remember it all began with Abraham. Abraham heard God's call and he and Sarah left Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the promised land. And then came Isaac, his son, and then Jacob, his grandson..... You look confused.

Leah: Yeah. They were married, weren't they? I mean, I thought I heard something about Sarah, and wasn't Isaac married to Rebekah? And Rachel, she married Jacob, right?

Jo: You're right.

Leah: Then where are their headstones?

Jo: Uh, I don't know. *(Searching)* It doesn't look like they are here.

Leah: Well that's not fair.

Jo: Don't argue with tradition, Leah. These three are the ones we are to remember and that is why they are here.

Leah: Remember for what? Yes, Abraham was a faithful man. But Isaac... wasn't Ishmael the oldest? And Jacob... am I supposed to forget the part about how he stole his brother's inheritance, or....

Jo: That's enough already. I am out here for a walk to relax and you're getting me all worked up. From Jacob comes the 12 tribes of Israel. And if it wasn't for Jacob, we wouldn't be here. And that is all you need to know!

Leah: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I just wanted to understand.

Jo: That's okay. As long as you understand that God knew what He was doing. *(Looking at Leah who is looking at the ground)* What are you looking at?

Leah: *(looking around)* I'm confused actually.... I thought Joseph would be here, right next to his father Jacob, but he's not. This headstone is for Judah.

Jo: Yeah, it does say Judah. *(Awkwardly)* Ummm, we come from Judah's line, not Joseph's.

Leah: What? Not Joseph's? But Joseph was the one that saved the whole family. When he was second only to Pharaoh in Egypt, he saved his family from famine. I can't believe this. How can it be Judah? Judah was the one who suggested selling Joseph into slavery.

Jo: His brothers wanted to kill Joseph. At least Judah didn't go for that.

Leah: But still, selling him into slavery. And then later, that thing with Tamar at the side of the road.....

Jo: *(Interrupting)* We don't talk about that!

Leah: Okay, okay.... It is hard to believe that the Messiah is going to come through him.

*(Freeze)*

Judah: *(comes on stage at the side)* Things aren't always as they appear. Many people have wondered 'why Judah?' Why did the Messiah come from the line of Judah? And they are right to wonder.

I am not the first born. I am the fourth. I am not the son of Rachel. Rather Leah is my mother. And, the girl there is right, I did convince my brothers not to kill Joseph, but we did get money for him.

But that is not the biggest thing I did wrong. You see, after we sold Joseph, things were rough in the family. It is hard to live a lie. I decided to move nearby to Adullam. This was in Caananite territory, of course. I met the daughter of a Caananite, we married and together we had three sons.

When my oldest son was grown, he married a woman whose name was Tamar. Tragically, my son died young. According to our custom, Tamar was given to my second son, but he also died without children being born. I had one more son.... but I was scared to give Tamar to him for fear that he may die young as well. I know I was going against tradition, but I only had one son left. This left Tamar very vulnerable. She had no one to care for her or provide for her. She asked me repeatedly to do what was lawful, to give her to my last son, but I did not. I did not trust God enough. So the one day she took matters into her own hands. She tricked me. I sinned. But God, in his mercy, transformed my sin into a gift.

So what do I say about all of this? I guess I have to say that even though I resisted God's will, God still worked out God's purposes. Even though I sinned, God worked to redeem. And if you look close enough, you will see that Tamar's headstone is there next to mine. My life is living proof that Christ came to save sinners.

**Carol:** "What child is this?"

Jo: I think we should be getting back. I am worried.

Leah: Just wait. This is interesting. Are there any other women here besides Tamar?

Jo: Yes, I think there are a few more, but I don't know if you should be looking at those.

Leah: Here is one. Rahab. Who was she?

Jo: *(uncomfortable)* Oh boy. I shouldn't be talking with you about these things.

Leah: Please tell me...

Jo: No, I can't. Your mother will never forgive me.

Rahab: Well if Joseph won't talk about it, I will. There was a time back in our history when the Israelites were about to enter the promised land. The first city they were going to come to was Jericho. You'll remember there were two spies that were sent in to take a look around. When they came into Jericho, they met up with me. I was a "woman of the night" shall we say. I met them and then took them back to my place.....but it is not what you think. You see, I knew that there was something different about these two guys. I knew that Jehovah was behind them. And I had a feeling for what was coming... I even told them that.

Then, as we were talking about these things, all at once there was a knock at the door. I opened it and there was some of the king's servants that said, "We heard that there are two foreign men here with you, bring them out."

But I said to them, "Yes it is true that two men 'were' here, but they left. They left through the city gate. If you hurry after them you can catch up with them." With that I closed the door and the king's servants left. You might wonder how they did not see the two men because they were still in my house. But, before I answered the door I had hidden them on the roof under a pile of straw.

When the king's servants left I made a pact with the two Israelite men. Because I hid them and kept them safe, they agreed to spare me and my family when all the tribes of Israel came to conquer the land. They agreed. So when we were finished talking, I lowered them down from my window over the wall and they ran off into the night. And true to their word, when the Israelites came back, they saved me and my whole family.

Years later now, I think about those days. I think about them a lot. And when I see what all happened, and what came after me, my heart trembles. The grace of God reached out to me and saved me and my family. And not only that, God brought me to the very centre of his plan. ... that through me the Messiah, the Saviour of the world would be born.

**Carol:** "Twas in the moon of Wintertime" #190

Leah: Wow! That is an amazing story. Rahab was so brave.

Jo: A few years later she bore a son and his name was Boaz. Here is his headstone. Remember Boaz? One of the pillars in the temple was named after him.

Leah: *(Amazed)* Oh yeah.

Jo: *(pointing now to Ruth's head stone)* Here is another brave woman. Her name was Ruth. She was a Moabite.

Leah: *(shocked)* She was a what?

Jo: A Moabite.... another foreigner.

Leah: But Joseph... we hated the Moabites.

Jo: We did. But you can't hate Ruth.

Ruth: In the time of the Judges, a man named Elimelech lived in Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Because of famine in the land, he decided to move to the land of Moab with his wife Naomi and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Not long after that move, he died. The two sons married Moabite women. Chilion married Orpah and Mahlon married me.

But tragedy struck us. Both Chilion and Mahlon died. And that left Orpah, Naomi and I to fend for ourselves. It was not easy. Naomi was still treated as a foreigner. And so were Orpah and I, because we had married Hebrew men.

Naomi decided that she wanted to go back to Bethlehem, back to her own country, back to her own tribe. Naomi told us that it would be too hard for us to come back with her. She told us to stay in Moab, to remarry and that way be looked after.

Orpah agreed, but I would not. I begged to go along. I loved her. I believed she was serving the one true God. I said to her, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried." Naomi believed what I said, and allowed me to come along.

We arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. I went out to glean some of the grain to provide for us. That is where I met Boaz, the son of Rahab. Boaz protected us. You see, Naomi's kinsmen was supposed to take us in, but he would not. Boaz obtained a release from him, and then took me to be his wife.

I can hardly believe it some days. I was a Moabite. I was still so young when my first husband had died. This could have meant tragedy for me. I decided to go with Naomi back to her home, a foreign land to me. I was so scared, so worried.... I wondered if Naomi's God would look after me.

*(pause)*

Not only did he look after me. For you see, through Boaz I gave birth to a son who we named Obed. His headstone is over there too. Obed was the father of Jesse. That is the same Jesse about whom Isaiah, yes Isaiah prophesied..... Who would have thought that God could use a Moabite widow to change the world?

Carol: "Lo, how a rose" #211

Leah: Sure enough. Obed, Jesse, their headstones are right here. And wow, *(pointing)* that is a huge grave marker. Oh, no wonder, it is for David.

Jo: That's King David, actually.

Leah: Hard to believe that God let him be king.

David: It is true. Many people wonder how it is that I came to be as important as I was. I began as a shepherd boy.... out in the fields by myself. But it was there that I grew very close to God. I was devoted, loyal,... I loved God.

But then there is also the part of me that is pretty hard and cold. You probably heard the story about the day that I was back at the palace. I had become king by then, and my soldiers were out in the field. Across the way I saw a Palestinian woman bathing. I sent for her, and.... you know what happened.

And that is not the worst of it. I found out that she was the wife of Uriah, a soldier in my army. So I had him sent to the front lines, and I gave instructions that when the fighting got intense, all others were to pull back, leaving him there on his own. They did as I said, and Uriah was killed. Then, to throw off suspicion, I took in his poor widow, making it look like it was an act of charity.

You might think that was 'cold'... yes it was. Yet..., yet, every night when I sat down to supper, there at my table was a crippled, club-footed man named Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth was Uriah's grandson. I had compassion on him. I took him in. And every day when I sat down to supper I looked at him and remembered what I had done to his grandfather and his grandmother.

So I meant every word I wrote in Psalm 51. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love....." And thinking of Mephibosheth, I conclude in verse 3 "....My sin was always before me."

And God in mercy, did not take the Holy Spirit from me. God did not condemn me for my sins. Instead, God used me to bring about divine purposes. The prophets spoke of the promised Messiah that would come from my lineage. He would cast out sin, and enter into hearts. He would be born in Bethlehem, but also born in all who would choose to believe. For them, he would do like he did for me. He restored to me the joy of his salvation.

**Carol: "O Little Town of Bethlehem" #191**

Leah: So who is next?

Jo: There is Solomon. You remember him right?

Leah: Yes, (*looking wise*) the wisdom of Solomon.

Jo: And then there are a whole bunch of kings. See there is Rehoboham, and Abijah, and Asaph, and Jehoshaphat. Remember hearing about him? He was

pretty good actually. (*Searching more*) Oh, and then there is Uzziah. He became a king when he was sixteen, a teenager.

Leah: Wow!

Jo: He died a leper.

Leah: (*Scared*) Oh.

Jo: Then there was Manassah, who ruled longer than anybody else. He ruled for fifty-five years, but rumour has it that he had to pay for his own headstone. He was no good, and he stayed in power all that time by compromise and total lack of conviction. Every kind of religious practice was legitimate to him. "Read the tea leaves, gaze at the crystal balls, practice superstition, do the witch dance, trust in God, bring it all in". He did not have a spine.

Leah: That's scary.

Jo: His son Amon wasn't much better, but his servants finally killed him. Oh, look... over here. Here is Josiah. Oh, Josiah.... he should have been a priest.

Josiah: I don't know about that, but I was a king. I came to the throne after they killed my father. The people made me king when I was just eight years old. It took me a long time to learn my role. But when I turned eighteen, I sent for the High Priest Hilkiah and asked him to pay the temple workers. With the money they bought more timbers and quarried stone and began making the needed repairs to the temple.

And then, as they were repairing and cleaning things up, they went through the temple treasury. And it was there that they found something. They found "the book of the law" written by Moses. You heard me right. The law of Moses had gone missing for some time. Actually, it's not that it went missing.... it had been forgotten. No one ever read from it anymore. No one looked to it for direction or guidance. None of the priests used it in worship.

When Hilkiah brought that book to me, I gathered all of the people to hear what it said. Quite frankly we were scared to death of what it said. We had done everything it said not to do! God's judgement was sure to come upon us.

I had to try and prevent the judgement of God. So when I learned that the King of Egypt was nearing the Euphrates, the armies and I planned to go out against him. When he heard that I was coming, he told me not to come because his quarrel was not with me. He said the Lord God even told him that. But I could not believe him. I disguised myself as a soldier and went out to fight. In battle I was wounded and I died.

Yes, I had done a lot of things right. I had seen how God had provided, how God had protected me from those who did not want to hear of the reforms that I brought. But in this case, I failed to trust God.



How important it is to trust the voice of God's messengers, no matter what things look like.

**Carol:** "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" #210

Jo: I had forgotten that about him. And to tell you the truth, I don't remember much about any of these others. All these guys are from after the time in Babylon. Except for over here. This is the grave of Matthan. He was my grandfather. *(Solemnly)* And here is my father's grave.... *(pause)* And the space over here.... well, that will be for me. Even though I am not really the father here, I will do what I am supposed to do.

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 1:18-25

Leah: You are a man of courage, Joseph. How you can see the grace of God at work here. Most men would have cut and run, but you trusted. You trusted the words of the angel messenger.

And I think that things are going to be okay back there *(pointing to the stable)* because, well, there is Mary and there is you. You will be the man that you will need to be. You will teach him, you will raise him, care for him, show him how to be a carpenter, take him to the synagogue, teach him the Bible, and teach him his lessons on how to live and do right.

I am feeling good about this. I think things are going to be okay because, you did what God asked of you. In the years to come, hopefully people will remember what you did. You could see all of this in the light of the love and grace and kindness of God. If the people that follow us can do the same, than the life of this child is certain to change the world.

Jo: Let us hope for that. .... And let's get back to the stable.

*(Walking slowly.... and then stopping and looking up)*

Jo: Do you hear something?

Leah: Yeah, .... it sounds like singing. Pretty angelic, if you ask me. *(Looking out toward the congregation)* And there are some people coming down the road.... they look like shepherds. I wonder what they're up to? *(Walk off of the stage)*

**Carol** "Angels We have heard on High" #197

Narrator: We don't know if Joseph went for a walk with his niece that evening. Likely not. But it was our hope that this drama might help us to understand the love and grace and kindness of God at work. What did happen for sure is that the Messiah was born. Emmanuel, God with us. We can see that Matthew's

genealogy shows us how the story of Jesus Christ contained - and would continue to contain - the flawed and inflicted and insulted, the cunning and the weak-willed and the misunderstood.

And this is of course, where the message settles directly upon us. If God's indescribable power could be displayed throughout history through these betrayers and outcasts; if God's perfect plan could be accomplished by people who were such a complex mixture of sinners and saints, and through so many obscure and undistinguished others, it is a pretty hopeful testament to the likelihood that God is using us, with our individual flaws and gifts, in all manner of powerful, peculiar and unexpected ways.

Who of us can say we're not in the process of being used right now, this Advent, to fulfill God's purpose? Who knows how we fit in to the grand scheme of what God is doing? The same God who anointed David, the same God who redeemed Rahab and used the traitor Judah, is the very God who sent Jesus as a tiny baby to save each one of us. This is the same God who desires to complete the work in us this very night. We know it is beyond lineage now. It is about calling each other to be part of God's story. So what if we think tonight about continuing the story of the sequence of Jesus Christ in this way, "Jesus Christ called Peter.... and Peter called Paul, ..... and Paul called Timothy.... someone called us, ....and we must call others.

By the love and grace and kindness of God the story goes on and will go on until he comes again.

God bless you this evening, this holy of nights.

We will be closing our service with a carol that we sing nearly every Christmas Eve. During that time we will light the Christ Candle, symbolizing the light of Christ that came to earth on this night many years ago - a light that still shines and embraces the earth tonight.

Please pray with me before we sing Silent night.

**Carol:** "Silent Night, holy night" #193