

Karen Hollis
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Matthew 1:18-25
Becoming Family

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning, in Christ Jesus, we pray, Amen.

You may have seen Ann with an “E”, the new tv adaptation of Anne of Green Gables. It’s a beautiful series depicting a Canadian family that broke the traditional mould and broke into our hearts.

In this new version Anne, Marilla and Matthew do their best to adjust to their new life and living situation. But when Anne is accused of stealing a brooch, Marilla sends her back to the orphanage. In Anne’s case, adoption appears to mean getting on a train in the hopes that kind people will collect her on the other side. There is no paperwork, no background checks; they haven’t made a legal commitment . . . there is only hope and goodwill. The plot thickens when Marilla finds her brooch and her brother rides off to remedy their mistake. After the adventure of finding Anne and bringing her back to Green Gables, and making amends, Matthew and Marilla realize they all need to make a commitment. So they call Anne into the parlour and invite her to take their name by signing the Cuthbert family Bible. Anne Shirley Cuthbert – the simplest of rituals, Anne agrees and quickly complicates it with her imagination.

Let’s turn now to Matthew’s gospel, out of which we will be reading this year; the first thing to know about it is family lines are very important. In fact, it opens with a genealogy of Jesus that includes Joseph, King David and going all the way back to Abraham. But there’s a problem: the text goes on to say, “the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in *this* way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child . . . from the Holy Spirit.”

In their culture, betrothal was equivalent to marriage; the marriage was completed when the groom took his betrothed into his own home. In the interval, she remained in her father’s house, and

physical contact was not permitted.¹ So, the child isn't Joseph's . . . and he knows it. But before he is able to carry out his plans to dismiss her, the angel blows open his understanding of the situation. The angel says name that child. By naming him, Joseph acknowledges him as his son; in effect, it is an adoption, which for Matthew's purposes incorporates Jesus into the genealogy of King David.² For Joseph, it gives him a way to say yes. One can imagine that upon hearing the news of what God had in mind for them, Joseph's heart is changed from preparing his life and home for a young woman named Mary . . . to ok, we're in this together. It's this kind of shift that really makes a family. The ceremony is only a symbol of a deeper truth that God is bringing us together for better or worse.

In a hostile culture toward the untraditional, the messenger offers a path forward for them to be a family. They set off for Bethlehem, anchored by a faith they ***will need*** on the journey ahead.

¹ FOW Year A, Vol 1 p. 93

² FOW Year A Vol 1 p. 95.