THE Incarnation IN THE Gospels

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this book of Christmas messages originate in the Reformed Expository Commentary series, having been adapted from our volumes on the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. Just as *The Incarnation in the Gospels* is an attempt to interpret the birth narratives of Jesus in a faithful, fresh way for our generation, the Reformed Expository Commentary seeks to set forth the whole counsel of God for our times from the exposition of God's Word.

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church, for the world. At the same time, the church must understand the comprehensive teaching of the whole Bible, which is the task of theology. The conviction underlying the Reformed Expository Commentary is that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine of the whole. We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and doctrinal reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. Our desire, then, is to inspire a renewed commitment to the Bible in the church, including the Bible's careful interpretation and fervent application for our times, and to serve as a resource for others who desire the same.

The Reformed Expository Commentary series has four fundamental commitments. First, our commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary thus presents a sequential treatment

of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture. Each volume teaches, explains, and defends the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are taught in the biblical text. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are understood to point us to Christ and his gospel. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life, with appropriate illustrations.

If you benefit from this collection of Christmas studies from the Gospels, we hope this book will serve as an introduction to the Reformed Expository Commentary series. All our pastor-scholar authors labor diligently to be servants of the church through their exposition of God's holy Word. Our desire is to assist you in understanding and teaching God's Word to others, so that the message of God's glorious grace in Christ might be made plain to our times, and so that God might receive from us the glory that he so abundantly deserves.

Richard D. Phillips, *Series Editor*
Philip Graham Ryken, *Series Editor*
Iain M. Duguid, *Old Testament Editor*
Daniel M. Doriani, *New Testament Editor*

PREFACE

This book presents twelve biblically and theologically grounded Christmas messages. The authors explore the canonical teaching on the birth of Jesus Christ in the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John (Mark says nothing of Jesus's birth). Together these passages cover most major issues regarding the incarnation: the connections between Jesus's birth and the Old Testament promises, the birth itself, the joy and the opposition that the birth aroused, the genealogy of Jesus, and the titles of the Lord, to name a few.

Matthew, Luke, and John provide three distinct accounts of the core events surrounding the birth of Christ and their significance. While the Gospels overlap at many points, Matthew leads us to contemplate the connection between Jesus and the people of Israel through the genealogy, the many titles Jesus receives, and the way events fulfill Scripture. Luke, the longest account of the incarnation, is the gospel of joy in the work of God. Luke presents four rich speeches/songs in which Mary, Zechariah, the shepherds, and Simeon exult in the Lord's work. John sees the incarnation from the perspective of the Father in heaven while the plan of redemption comes to fruition as God's light enters the world through the birth of the Son.

We want to lead you toward an exploration of the unique riches of each book. We also confess that each book shares foundational beliefs about the incarnation. Orthodox churches have always affirmed these beliefs, and we wholeheartedly affirm them. These we confess and preach:

1. Jesus, Lord and Christ, is the unique Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. He is truly and eternally God, of one substance with the Father.
2. Like the Father and the Spirit, Jesus the Son is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, truth, love, and grace.
3. Jesus is truly God and truly man, yet one person, the Christ, the only mediator between God and man. Jesus is complete and perfect in his deity and his humanity, yet he is one person, for the two natures are joined inseparably and without confusion.
4. In the fullness of time, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, apart from the will or action of any man.
5. In the incarnation Jesus became a man and took a human nature, including a true human body, soul, mind, will, and emotions. In his humanity, Jesus had all the weaknesses of humanity, but not the sinful nature.
6. The birth of Jesus is no end in itself but is part of the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption. Jesus exercised the offices of prophet, priest, and king in his role as mediator and especially took on human flesh that he might suffer in that flesh, offering himself as a substitutionary sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people.

PART 1

The Hope of Israel

Daniel M. Doriani

1

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 1:1–17

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matt. 1:1)

The biblical accounts of the birth of Christ answer all the questions people like to ask. How? By the direct, miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit, a virgin conceived. Why? To usher in the climactic stage of God's plan of redemption. When and where? In Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod the Great, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Yet there is no doubt that the Gospels, not least Matthew, take greatest interest in the question "Who?" Who is this who is born after such preparation, amid such great signs and portents?

We know intuitively that Matthew's interest in the identity of Jesus is right. We know that all hope of making sense of events rests on a knowledge of the characters. This is true of the birth of Jesus as it is true for any striking event.

One Saturday I headed off for a doubles tennis match against the best team in the league. I arrived hoping for an upset, and those hopes surged as I began to warm up with one of our opponents. He

was a big, hard-hitting lefty, but he looked erratic and slow-footed. Much hinged on his partner, who had not arrived. The minutes ticked away and the time for a forfeit approached when Lefty asked a club pro to find someone to fill in. The pro returned with a slender man named Altof, who moved like a leopard and held his racket in a faintly menacing way. I began to hit with Altof. In league play, men warm up watchfully, trying to judge their opponents' skills and deficiencies. As I watched Altof, I saw all skill and no deficiencies. His strokes were effortless, his footwork flawless. Every ball he struck came in deep and hard. I leaned over and told my partner, "We need to hit to your man; mine looks *very* solid."

We tried to hit everything to Lefty, and it worked well enough that the score was tied 4–4 after eight games. Then, suddenly Altof was everywhere, crushing the ball for winner after winner; we lost the first set, 6–4. Before the second set began, I heard Altof whisper to Lefty, "I need to finish soon." I told my partner, "If we lose the second set in fifteen minutes, we'll know something is up." Indeed, we lost 6–1 in 14 minutes, with Altof covering the entire court, punishing us in point after point. As we shook hands at the net, I said, "That was impressive. Now tell me who you are."

"Well," he confessed, "I'm a pro here, just filling in so you could have a match."

"Oh, I figured that out a while ago," I smiled. "I want to know: who are you?!"

"OK," he said, "I'll tell you. I was a touring pro till a year ago; I played for India's Davis Cup team." He had been one of the top 200 players in the world. Now that I knew who he was, I could make sense of our match.

The gospel of Matthew operates on this very principle. Events make sense if and only if we know who the characters are. Matthew 1 certainly describes some very unusual events. There is a virgin who is pregnant by the agency of the Holy Spirit. An angel appears to prevent a young man from setting aside an unwed

mother. Later, an angel picks the name of their child and declares that he will be the Savior.

It's an incomprehensible story, unless you know the characters. So, then, who is this child? It's a good question; people ask it over and over in the Gospels:

- A storm threatens to swamp a boat and drown everyone on board. Jesus stands up and rebukes the wind and the waves, and they stop at once. His disciples see this and ask, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41; see also Matt. 8:27).
- He forgives sins, and they ask, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:49).
- He enters Jerusalem attended by a crowd that lays cloaks and palm branches on the road before him. They call out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and the city asks, "Who is this?" (Matt. 21:9–10).
- At his trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest of the Jews says, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." The Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, asks, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Matt. 26:63; 27:11).

The whole gospel of Matthew *asks* and the whole gospel of Matthew *tells* who this is. The reader starts to learn who Jesus is in the first chapter. The child's name is Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (1:1, 21). He is the Christ, anointed by God for a given task (1:1, 18). He is the son of David—born king of the Jews (1:1; 2:2). He is the son of Abraham, for he will bring God's blessing to the nations (1:1, 18). He is born of the Holy Spirit (1:18). He is Immanuel, for he is "God with us" (1:23).

Jesus received names such as Jesus and Immanuel not because they were fashionable, not because they were manly, not because of family heritage, but because they were fraught with

significance. Each name reveals part of Jesus's identity. The question "Who is this?" leads next to the vital question, "Why is he important?" The answer is traced through the hopes and fears of 2,000 years of Israel's history. So Matthew 1 introduces us to our hero by stating his name and his origin.

Jesus the Savior

As Matthew introduces Jesus, he quickly reveals several names and titles. Jesus is son of Abraham, therefore he is the hope of both Gentiles and Jews. He is son of David (1:1), therefore the great king of the Jews (2:2, 6). He is the Christ (1:1; 2:4), therefore anointed by God for some crucial task. But first and best, he is Jesus, the Savior (1:1, 21–23).

Jesus is a Hebrew name. In Hebrew it is Joshua; in Greek that becomes Jesus. Joshua means "the Lord [Yahweh] saves" or "The Lord is salvation." The name Joshua reminds us of the Joshua who succeeded Moses and led Israel into the promised land. In that day, the Lord saved his people physically and materially by giving them their land and ending their years of wildernesswandering.

Jesus does not save us this way. He did not save Israel from military enemies. Jesus did save some people from physical illness and danger (8:25; 9:21–22), but physical deliverance is not the essence of his work. Rather, such deliverance pointed beyond itself to God's eternal restoration of all things. Psalm 130:7–8 says, "O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their *sins*." In the long run, God cares about salvation from enemies, disease, and death, but that part of his program lies in the future, when Jesus returns.

By his incarnation, Jesus began to address the problem that lies at the root of all pains and sorrows. He came to save his people from their sins. We see this already in the genealogy of Jesus.

The genealogy shows that Jesus descended from the line of Jewish kings. Matthew names fifteen of them, from David to Jeconiah, also known as Jehoiachin. So Jesus came from a noble line. But if we look hard, we see that this regal group was not especially righteous. About half of the kings were men of faith. Several, including David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, were great men. Still, even among the believers, some committed striking sins. Jehoshaphat entered into alliances with wicked men (2 Chron. 20:35–37). In foolish pride, Hezekiah showed the treasures of Israel to her powerful enemies, who later plundered them (2 Kings 20:12–18). After years of successful rule, Uzziah became proud and dared to usurp the role of a priest and entered the Lord's temple to burn incense on the altar (2 Chron. 26:1–22).

About half the kings in the genealogy were truly wicked. Ahaz worshiped the pagan gods of Assyria. He practiced human sacrifice. He killed one of his own sons. He stripped the gold and silver from the temple and gave it to other kings. He defiled the Lord's altar and installed pagan altars instead (2 Kings 16). Nor was Ahaz alone. Rehoboam and Jeconiah were almost as bad, and Manasseh was worse. Indeed, Manasseh "did more evil than the nations" that the Lord drove out of Canaan. He promoted the worship of idols and murdered innocent people (2 Kings 21:9–18).

So Jesus's genealogy includes great kings and sordid sinners. Regal as his lineage was, Jesus came not to praise his forebears but to save them. If you doubt this, consider the four women in the genealogy. People often wonder why we find women inserted, apparently at random, in the genealogy. The answer is clear if we notice that common threads appear in the foursome that is interwoven with the kings: "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife"

(Matt. 1:5–6). Three women are listed here; the fourth, Tamar, gets a mere mention in 1:3. The four are

- Tamar the daughter-in-law of Judah, who was the son of Jacob; she played the role of a prostitute (Gen. 38).
- Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, who helped Israel's spies (Josh. 2; 6).
- Ruth, the Moabitess who was adopted into the family of Boaz (Ruth 1–4).
- Bathsheba, the paramour of David and the wife of a Hittite (2 Sam. 11–12).

Within this quartet, all but Tamar came from foreign lands or families. They were outside the family of God. Moreover, of the four, three were either prostitutes or adulteresses. The point is clear: Jesus comes from the *human* line, pimples and all. His own people, his own family, needed him to save them from their *sins*.

The last part of Jesus's genealogy shows that Israel was suffering the consequences of its sin (1:11–16). The borders of Israel had failed to hold. Assyria dethroned Israel's king and Babylon conquered Judah, deported its leaders, and declared the pitiful remnant to be their vassals.

Jesus's ancestors lost their rank as kings, lost their wealth and land, and nearly lost their identity. We could compare the family of Jesus to the last derelict scion of a once-great family. They were Roosevelts, Lincolns, or Jeffersons, but had fallen far over the years. In any shattered clan, some are drunks, gamblers, or wastrels; others are decent folk, perhaps, but lack any great skill or asset. Those are the people Jesus came to save, then and now. We too have lowlifes in our family, and we have done things that fit a lowlife-laden family.

Christ, the Anointed One

Jesus is a given name. *Christ* eventually became Jesus's second name in Christian usage, but originally it was a title for the Messiah. As a title, it simply means "anointed one." To be anointed is to be set apart and empowered by God for a task he appoints. In Israel, priests were always anointed (Ex. 28–30), kings were always anointed (1 Sam. 9; 16), and prophets were sometimes anointed (1 Kings 19:16).

In Jesus's day, *Christ* came to signify a specific king, one anointed with God's strength to deliver the people. The people thought of the Christ as a king because they hoped for a military victory and release from Rome. One book from the time said it this way:

> See Lord, and raise up for them their king,
> The son of David, to rule over your servant Israel
> In the time known to you, O God.
> Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers,
> To purge Jerusalem from Gentiles
> Who trample her to destruction. (Psalms of Solomon 17:21–22)

Matthew's gospel gradually reveals that Jesus was anointed for a far greater victory, one that he accomplished by taking all three of the main leadership offices of Israel. He is the king, anointed to defeat our greatest foes—sin and death. He is the priest, anointed to offer a sacrifice to remove the guilt of sin. He is the prophet, anointed to tell the truth about humanity and himself. The greatest truth is that he defeated sin for us because we cannot defeat sin. He offered himself to remove our guilt because we cannot atone or compensate for our sin.

But Jesus is anointed to do more than fulfill the three main offices in Israel. He completes other tasks, as Matthew will show us. He fulfills the role of the Sabbath, by giving true rest to his people. He fulfills the role of the temple, for in him God and mankind meet. He judges mankind, knowing every thought and deed, and forgiving every misdeed if we ask for mercy, believing he can grant it.

The title *Christ* signifies a man who is anointed with oil to consecrate him for a special office. Jesus was commissioned by God for a special task. It is vital that we let God define that task. In Jesus's day, most Israelites believed God's Messiah would free them from Roman domination and, somehow, triumph over unrighteousness and purify the nation.

We now know that these hopes were partly right and partly wrong. Jesus did triumph over sin and purify the nation, but he did not liberate Israel from Rome. When Jesus failed to deliver the people the way *they* expected, some adjusted their expectations, but many others concluded that he must not be the Messiah.

The problem of misguided expectations is common to mankind. We regularly trust the wrong people or expect them to provide what they cannot or should not give. Some Americans expect our superior armed forces to keep us perfectly safe. Some expect their skills to make them prosperous and secure. Jesus says the wise man builds his house upon the rock—not "a" rock, but "the" rock, that is, Jesus the Christ (Matt. 7:24).

Still, even those who try to build on the rock can suffer disappointment, if they remake Jesus in their image. How so? They may expect Jesus to make life easy. They may think they can know Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. But we must let him define himself: he is both Savior and Lord.

The Son of David, the Hope of Israel

On the side of his father Joseph, Jesus descended, by human accounting, from the royal line of David. He is the offspring of the kingly line. He is the heir of all Israel's godly kings: Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and the rest. He is the king of the Jews.

But Jesus is not just any king. He is the son of David (1:1). "Son of David" seems to organize the entire genealogy. There are fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen more from the rise of David to the end of his dynasty, when Israel went into exile, and fourteen more until the Christ, the son of David, was born (1:17).

There was a strong hope, in Jesus's day, for a king who would restore Israel to its former glory and liberate the nation from Roman oppression and degradation. Israel based this hope on a promise the Lord gave David: that David would one day have an heir, a son who would bring a golden age of strength and blessing (2 Sam. 7:12–13, 15):

> When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. . . . My love will never be taken away from him.

This anointed king, this son of David and Son of God, would subdue the kings of the earth and rule them with an iron scepter (Ps. 2:2–9).

Jesus is called "son of David" nine times in Matthew, and that underlines two points. First, he is the long-promised heir of David (1:1, 20). Through him Israel hoped for restoration. He

is mighty to defeat the powers of Satan (12:23) and perhaps the powers of Rome.

Second, the people expected the king to heal the land, when he removed the Romans and other pagans who defiled it. They also expected healing for the people, one by one. They believed, to use J. R. R. Tolkein's words, "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer."[1] So the people asked Jesus for mercy and for healing. Early in his ministry, in Galilee, two blind men followed Jesus and called out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (9:27). Even when Jesus traveled to neighboring regions, the people expected him to heal. Once a Canaanite woman approached him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession" (15:22). Again, just before Jesus entered Jerusalem, "Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!' The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!' " (20:30–31).

There is a pattern in these encounters. First, the outsiders of Jewish society and the occasional Gentile "appeal to Jesus as Son of David and are thereby healed." Second, the crowds "generally respond to these healings with doubt." For example, when Jesus cast demons out of a man who was blind and mute, so he could see and talk, the people asked, "Could this be the Son of David?" (12:23). Third, "the religious authorities respond with anger (21:15) and blasphemy" (12:22–32).[2]

In the last week of his ministry, Jesus healed many in the temple precincts. He saw twisted, broken limbs, and he mended

1. J. R. R. Tolkein, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (New York: Ballantine, 1955), 150.

2. D. R. Bauer, "Son of David," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

them with a word. Instantly, muscles strengthened and sinews tightened. Eyes bleared and broken with disease and injury could see again. The children (of small account in that day), seeing that the lame walked and the blind could see, began to shout praise to the healer: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" But the chief priests and scribes became indignant and asked, "Do you hear what these children are saying?" That is to say, "Tell them to stop." Jesus replied that he did hear them and saw God's purpose in it, for Psalm 8 says, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise" (21:14–16).

The son of David offers his strength to the weak and wounded. He offers hope to the yearning heart, because the mighty king, the son of David, is a tender healer. To this day, "son of David" is a title of healing strength. In God's economy, the strength of Jesus appeals especially to the weak—to the no-accounts. I once had a conversation with someone who hoped to tell a friend about Christ. She commented, "But she has everything, so it's difficult for her to see that she needs Jesus."

There are different kinds of strength, and there is more than one way to "have everything."

Still, if anyone thinks he has no needs at all, if anyone thinks he has all the strength he needs, then the son of David will not be very appealing. But if this offer sounds appealing—"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 ESV)—then the strong son of David is for you.

The Son of Abraham, Savior for the Nations

The last title for Jesus in Matthew 1:1 is the son of Abraham. The genealogy in Matthew starts with Abraham, the father of Israel. By contrast, the genealogy in Luke starts with Adam, the father of mankind. Yet the point in Matthew is not that Jesus is only for the Jews, but that Jesus is for all the children of Abraham.

The common explanation of the difference between the genealogies runs this way: Luke starts with Adam to show that the Savior is descended from the first man. Luke wants to write a gospel for Gentiles, so he says Jesus is from mankind and for all mankind. People say Matthew is the gospel for the Jews, so he starts with Abraham, the father of the Jews. Every Israelite called himself a son of Abraham, but especially those who sought to live by faith and walk with God (Matt. 3:9; Luke 1:73; 19:9; John 8:39–58; Acts 7:2; Rom. 4:1, 12). Yet Matthew expects us to know that Abraham was a pagan, a Gentile, before God called him. He was the father of the covenant people, but he was born outside the covenant and stayed there until God brought him in.

Abraham began life as a pagan, chosen by God to establish his people, Israel. But from the beginning, God swore he would give Abraham back to the nations. God's greatest promise to Abraham says, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:2–3).

God also promised Abraham that through his offspring "all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The gospel of Matthew ends with this very idea: Jesus will bless the nations. He commands the apostles to make disciples of "all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

Matthew starts to make this point already in the genealogy, in the first lines of his gospel. As it traces Jesus's forbears, there is a twist. Matthew's genealogy seems to be patriarchal—he mentions the fathers but not the mothers of Jesus's forebears. But as we saw, there are exceptions. Matthew mentions four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, who is called "the wife of Uriah."

As we mentioned, three of the four are flagrant sinners. And three of them share something else—they are not Israelites. Rahab was a Canaanite, from Jericho. Ruth was a Moabitess. Bathsheba married a Hittite, ergo she probably (not certainly)

was a Hittite herself. So Jesus has *Gentiles* in the family line! If Matthew is the gospel for the Jews, it is for a certain kind of Jew: the Jewish believer who hopes *all the nations* will taste the blessings God offers through faith in Jesus.

The Significance of the Titles

Many Christians share at least some Jewish heritage (I do), but most American Christians are Gentiles. Most of us are the descendants of pagans, not Israelites. Centuries ago, our ancestors worshiped Zeus or Thor, natural or ancestral deities. We were outside the covenant—strangers and aliens to God. The promise to Abraham that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" was our sole hope. We are sons of Abraham, sons and daughters of the covenant, through the grace of God that reaches out to the lost.

A funny thing happens to churchgoers in America. It begins to seem *obvious* to us that we are Christians. It seems like our birthright. In a way, if our parents are Christians, it *is* our birthright. But from another perspective, most of us need to remember that we are Gentiles, not Israelites—outsiders, not insiders. The God of Israel is our God, even though we are German, English, French, Dutch, African, Irish, and Russian. Therefore we should still marvel at this grace. If we marvel, if we give thanks that *we* are included in the family of God, then we will include others and give thanks for the presence of others as well.

The Christmas season, along with Easter, certainly affords us an opportunity to welcome outsiders into our church. It is tempting to joke about, to mock, even to scorn the "Christmas and Easter Christians." But why? In ourselves, none of us is a whit more spiritual or sincere than they. We should welcome all who stand outside the covenant, for the Lord calls outsiders to himself.

At some point, most of us have tasted the angst of waiting to hear whether we gained entry to some desirable but exclusive

group. It might have been a tree house club for ten-year-olds, a basketball team, a student government, an elite college. After people enter an exclusive club, they can turn one of two ways. They can think, "What a great club—and they let a marginal character like me in. I need to welcome the other marginal characters, the folks who wonder whether they will be accepted, so they can gain the benefits I have." Or they can think, "If I got in, the standards must be slipping. I must ensure that our standards stay high, so this club stays exclusive."

We ought to take the first approach. What a joy to enter the family of God. Let us hold the blessing with humble, grateful hearts and pray, "Thank you, Lord, for making me a child of Abraham. Thank you for including me in your family. Help me remember that your family is always open. Help me welcome to it both those who seem worthy and those who seem unworthy. For I know that I am not worthy, but I am beloved."

The Lord's titles both tell us who Jesus is and suggest the proper responses to him. He is Jesus, the Savior. Therefore let us receive his salvation. He is the Christ, the one anointed to restore his people. Let us turn to him to restore us when we falter. He is the son of David, the mighty yet tender healer. Therefore, let us turn to him for healing. He is the son of Abraham, the father of all the faithful, sent to fulfill the hopes of Jews and Gentiles alike. Therefore, let us welcome all to the family of God.