

We began Advent by taking a look at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. It is important to note that Matthew's target audience at the time he wrote, were the Jewish people. Genealogies are important to the Jews for several reasons: determining ownership of property and right of inheritance, but also because the each of the twelve tribes had a role to play. For instance, if one had genes from the tribe of Levi—that is *Levi's genes* **not** *Levi's jeans*—one's vocation was pre-determined. All the males were priests.

Last time our focus was on the first third of the genealogy. What was notable there, is the mention of four women. Three of the four were of questionable character, and all of them were "foreigners", outsiders to the covenant. Yet God used them along with the others named, to fulfill his promise to Abraham—that he would have many descendants through whom the entire world would be blessed, and his promise to David, that David's throne and Kingdom would last forever. The over-arching theme of which is: GRACE. God uses saints and sinners to accomplish God's eternal purpose and bring about the salvation of the world through Jesus the Messiah.

Today we are focusing on the remainder of Jesus' genealogy, as it is in Matthew's Gospel. I know you'll want to follow along as I read Matthew 1 starting at verse 6b-17.

[Read scripture. Pray.]

There is a fascination today with discovering one's roots. The internet makes researching one's family tree easier than ever before and simple DNA tests can further refine the information one can discover. Why this fascination? I think it has to do with our desire to understand who we are: our identities, our uniqueness, our place in the world and in relationship to others. We want to know about our roots.

Joey, a third grader, was given an assignment to write about his family history. So that evening he asked his parents:

"Where did I come from?"

To which his parents replied: "The stork delivered you."

"Well then, where did you come from?"

Again he was told, "The stork delivered us too."

“And grandma and grandpa?”

He received the same reply. So, Joey wrote his brief report.

Joey’s teacher was surprised to read:

“I am having a hard time with this family history because apparently there has not been a natural childbirth in my family for three generations!”

Matthew divides his genealogy into three sections—each having 14 generations. I already described the first group where the focus is on the fulfillment of two of God’s covenants: with Abraham and King David’s—and that through their descendants, the Messiah will come. The theme of this section is the mercy and grace of God.

The second section is represents a downward movement if you will. The people of Israel had been warned repeatedly by the prophets that if they didn’t shape up and return to worshipping God, that they’d get shipped out to Babylon as captives. This section is dominated by bad kings: kings like Manasseh who sacrificed his own son in the fire to a foreign god. How bad was he? 2 Kings 21, records: “he was a terror to his people”. His other son Amon, was not much better, as he also rejected God. All but a handful of these kings were pretty rotten scoundrels, and frankly, that’s putting a positive spin on it.

The sad result was that, having ignored the persistent warnings of the prophets to shape up and return to worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, judgement came upon them. Indeed, the land was overrun by the armies of King Neb of Babylon, their homes and crops were destroyed, the temple left in ruins, and countless people were shipped off into captivity for 70 years! An entire generation!

So why does Matthew include the bad and the ugly with the good? Why not rewrite history, or at least be selective, clean it up a little, or cast it in a brighter light?

More to the point, why does God use these people and why do we need to know their stories are a part of our history, our family tree?

1—Honestly, I’m glad that Matthew includes the bad and the ugly because by doing so, we see that God uses ordinary, flawed human beings. And

2—I think it emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. He was “God with skin on”,

God with us, but not a distant uncaring God, but one who identified with us in all our messiness.

3—**God can and does overcome evil with good!** Judgement or the natural consequences of our disobedience is inescapable. But **judgement is not God's last word!** God's purposes will **not** be thwarted by flawed human beings who willingly or unwillingly are doing their best to defeat God's good and eternal plan! No matter how despairing we may be, we have reason for HOPE Because...

4—**God is sovereign.** God is in control, even when it appears to us that this is not the case. God is in control of history: Four hundred years of slavery in Egypt could **not** stop God's plan. Seventy years in Babylon could **not** stop God's plan. Corrupt kings, murderers, adulterers, prostitutes, idolaters, cheaters, liars, sinners all—**not** one of them—in the very lineage of Jesus, could stop God's plan!

5—And all of this, brings us HOPE! Hear again these words from the pen of the Apostle Paul:

Galatians 4:4-7 New International Version (NIV)

⁴But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship: ⁶Because you are [his/God's] sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Isn't this good news?? **We are grafted into Jesus' family tree by adoption!** If we are heirs, then we are written into the will! We will receive an inheritance! If you want to know your truest identity—it is as one made in the image of God, as a son or daughter of God!

When I was involved in an after-school program for elementary students at the church in Des Moines, two nine year old girls were finishing up some homework while the rest had gone outside to play.

Rosa made a casual comment about being adopted.

This was news to Angel, who is also adopted. Her response:

"NO WAY."

"Yes, WAY!" Rosa replied.

"Me too!!" Angel said. "My mom and dad *chose* me! They didn't have *any choice* with my sister. She just came the *usual way*."

It was the perfect opening to say to them:

Did you know the word "adoption" is in the Bible?"

"No Way!" they replied.

"Yes, WAY!" I said, and I proceeded to show them these verses in Galatians. They got so excited to know that we are ALL adopted into God's family.

God has no grandchildren. Only sons and daughters. Each one of us has our own unique spiritual journey. Each one must come into our own relationship with God. I cannot do that for my own sons, nor can you do it for your children.

This is one reason why claiming to be a son of Abraham was so important to the Jews. It was their "free ticket" into the nation of Israel. If an individual could claim to be descendant of good ol' Abe, he or she was "in". That was true of the Old Covenant. Not so with the New!

Our parents are responsible for our birth into the human family, but it is the Holy Spirit who is the active party with to anyone's spiritual birth into God's family. All God's children enter God's family by adoption.

Paul writes in Romans 9:16, regarding our adoption:

"It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

<https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=adoption&qsversion=NIV>

The themes of Matthew's genealogy are exactly that: God's grace and mercy (in the first third), followed by God's judgement (in the second third) we now see God's faithfulness in the final third which culminates in the birth of Jesus. It is as if Matthew is beginning his gospel by reminding his hearers/readers that God made a promise, the promise of the Messiah, and Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

In between the promise and making good on that promise, God uses the ups and downs of Israel to shape a theological pattern of divine grace, judgement, and faithful love (*hesed*). . "Jesus is the fulfillment of the whole

Old Testament story and of all its events taken together in their totality.” (p. 13, Matthew, Vol. 1, F.D. Bruner)

In my study I learned something quite interesting. “...by Palestinian law, the head of a family was no less the father of his adopted children than of those children whom he procreated” (Bonn., 17). Joseph’s fatherhood was no less God given than ours: ours comes through the mystery of nature: Joseph’s came through God’s miraculous creative power.

Thus, the genealogy and the story of the miraculous conception of Jesus, are not incompatible with one another but complementary. (Beare, p. 13 quoted by FD Bruner, Matthew, Vol. 1)

As Matthew looks back on the generations preceding Jesus, he sees key periods in the history of Israel—the covenants/promises to Abraham and David, the judgement of Exile, and the fulfillment of the promises in Jesus the Messiah. The thread that runs through each generation is the graceful sovereignty, love and faithfulness of a Promise-keeping God.

Our children and grandchildren wait impatiently for Christmas to finally arrive. Advent calendars or paper chains can help them grasp the number of days remaining, but waiting is hard.

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the disciples waited, fully expecting the immanent return of Christ. This is one reason they were passionate and felt an urgency about sharing the Good News with others.

I dare say **we** have grown complacent. But hear this from the pen of Peter:

⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise [regarding Christ’s second coming], as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. 2 Peter 3:8-9-10

At the right time, God sent his Son into the world the first time. And at the right time—yet to be revealed, God will send Christ back into the world—his Second Coming/Advent.

How would you behave differently if you knew with certainty that Jesus would return one week from today? What would you do to prepare?

Would you mend a fence—that is, would you reach out to someone from whom you are estranged, in order to restore the relationship?

Would you be more bold in sharing the good news of Christ's coming?

What would you do to prepare for Jesus' coming?

Rob Robbins was an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war. After his 300th mission, he was ordered to pull out. Pleasantly surprised, he and his crew flew back to the states, arriving at their base in Massachusetts. Along with some of his buddies, they drove west where they dropped him off at his home in Western Pennsylvania. The early morning sun was just coming up as he stood at the end of his driveway. A huge banner hung across the garage door, declaring "Welcome Home, Dad!"

How did they know? No one had called. The crew themselves were surprised by their change in orders and their unexpected leave.

As Rob walked into the house, his kids screamed and tackled him, "Daddy!"

His wife Susan came running down the hall, already dressed for the day.

"How did you know?" Rob asked her.

"I didn't", she replied with tears of joy. "Once we heard the war was over, we knew you'd be home one of these days. We knew you'd try to surprise us, so we've been ready every day." (Lee Eclov, "Heaven", [Christianity Today](#) 2017)

Friends, if God kept his promise to Abraham, and to David, after all 42 generations, do you think God will keep his promise to us regarding Jesus' second coming? (I think God will!) Will YOU be ready??

Furthermore, if you are on first name basis with the Savior, the judgement of which Peter speaks is **not something to be feared**. Because when that day comes—and it will—Remember this:

"The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally, will be *the one who loves us most fully*." (Frederick Buechner, [Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC](#) (Harper Collins, 1993), p. 58)

Now that is Good News!

The best gift this Christmas will not be wrapped up under the tree, nor will it be parked in your driveway topped with a gigantuous bow!

The best gift of all is belonging to the family of God, and being grafted into Jesus' family tree! This can be your ancestry and mine as well because God

is a promise-keeping God!