

December 1, 2019 Jesus: Ancestry.com Matthew 1:1-17

The very first reading of Advent 2019, I have chosen from Matthew's Gospel. That gives me an opening to say a number of things. First of all, one commentator makes the remark that Matthew's Gospel is the natural bridge between the whole of the Old Testament and the whole of the New. Its first words throw us back to the father of the Jewish people, Abraham, and David, Israel's greatest King. Until our era, and the advances in knowledge through archeology it was assumed Matthew was the first Gospel account to be written down. We now know almost all of the New Testament documents were written much earlier than we once assumed. However, as the early church was composed almost entirely of Jewish believers, Matthew with its strong Jewish flavor, its abundance of quotations from the Old Testament, it was an easy assumption that Matthew's account was first used in congregational worship and the natural source book, as the Gospel concerning Jesus was shared with a larger world.

We live in a time when interest in family roots, heritage, and ancestry have gone off the charts. DNA testing has made the pursuit of family history easier. But the prime instrument that has made these pursuits available is the household computer, and the data records of births, marriages, deaths and immigration. It is fascinating but not surprising that Matthew begins by giving us the family tree for Jesus. Every

name in the list that Matthew provides reminds us of a story from the Old Testament.

It begins with Abraham, the man whom God called to go on a journey in search of the promised land. He gathered his family, his flocks and herds, his servants and began a trek without ever knowing his actual destination. He trusted God the Almighty, God the Gracious, to show him the way, day by day, and to keep he and his dear ones safe. His faith is astounding. I mean, would we today set out on a journey without knowing where we were going? And I do not mean to suggest Abraham was perfect. There were moments when he absolutely failed the character test. He hid behind his wife, passing her off as his sister, in hopes of saving his own skin. And yet the fact is he becomes the father of a nation that yearns for the salvation of God in the child that was born in Bethlehem.

David, the King is on that list. David who gave us the balance if not all of the Psalms. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." That David. The young soldier in the service of King Saul who is willing to face Goliath, not with the weapons of a soldier of the time, but with a sling, and three smooth stones. He would bring down the Philistine leader, and then spend years on the run as Saul the jealous king hunted him down, trying to make his own crown secure. Under David the tribes were truly united. Under David Israel became a super power. And yet it is David who has blood on his hands, Verse 6 of Matthew chapter 1, "David was the father of Solomon, whose

mother was Uriah's wife." Uriah was a faithful soldier in the service of David. David arranged Uriah's death in order that he might have Bathsheba as wife. At least 2 sins. Wanting another's wife, and murder.

Four women are mentioned in this list of Jesus ancestors. Women are seldom mentioned in eastern genealogical tables. But here they are: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, (her who had been the wife of Uriah). It gets more astonishing, at least surprising, when you remember Tamar and Rahab were both harlots. Rahab was the prostitute who helped the spies sent by Joshua to scope out Jericho. The walls of Jericho would fall and Rahab would be saved, with her household because of her helping the cause of God's chosen people. Bathsheba had participated in adultery, and Rahab and Ruth were Gentiles, not Jews at all.

Where does this list lead? It leads to Joseph who was of the lineage of the house of David the King. It leads to Joseph who would plan how to walk away from Mary who was promised to him in marriage. It would lead to the young woman Mary, who when told of what God had chosen her for said as her first reaction, "No way, not me, I never, because she knew how Joseph would react, she could count the cost...shame, perhaps even death. Every one of these names leads us to Nazareth, and from there to Bethlehem, and to Jesus.

Is the list complete? No absolutely not. There are at a minimum a number of kings who are left out, at a minimum. But I will tell you this: every name on that list belonged to a person who in a moment of faith served the will of God, and who in a moment of denial was guilty of sin. Every name on the tree is the name of someone in need of the grace of God and just like you and me, in need of God's saving work. We read the family tree in Matthew because it points us to Calvary, to Jesus, to the resurrection and eternal life.

With this reading of those names we hear the name of Jesus. And that means we have once again begun the journey that leads to Christmas, Christ's birth, and thereby ultimately we have begun the journey to Good Friday and to Easter. It is Advent 2019, and we have taken the first steps.

Let us pray;

Lord our God, you ordained the paths of so many, and you ordained that Jesus should be born in Bethlehem. We confess on this first day of Advent 2019, that you have ordained and ordered our steps too. We seek the baby who will become the child and then the man, Jesus who is the Christ. Grant us faith for the journey. Grant that we may be found faithful in your sight. Hallelujah. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

