

Christ's Family

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on December 23, 2018

Matthew 1:1-17

1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, 4 and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, 7 and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, 8 and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9 and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. 12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. 17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportati bnon to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

One of the things I enjoy doing when I visit people in their homes is going through their photo albums with them. Usually it doesn't take very long, but, in that brief span of time each picture that we view takes its turn to speak a thousand words to us and each book we open tells the story of a family that is rich with history and meaning.

In our Scripture passage this morning, Matthew offers us a similar experience. In the span of a minute or so, he gives us a list of nearly fifty names covering 2000 years of church history. And like the photographs in an album, each name listed tells a story of a family; Christ's family - our family. And each story is rich with history and meaning.

In our Scripture passage this morning, Matthew reminds us of the special memories that tell us who we are and where we are going. And in doing so, he invites us to sit together as a family, and take a journey down memory lane. Matthew invites us to remember the past so we might re-enter the present with insight and wisdom and follow God's leading into the future.

So what are the memories? What are the insights and the wisdom we are to gain? Like

the treasures of a photo album, it will take multiple viewings to acquire the full picture. But, in any given sitting, like today, certain stories will attract our attention and capture our imagination.

For example, in the list of Christ's genealogy, did you notice the names of the women mentioned? There were five of them. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. And do you remember their stories? Let us walk down memory lane.

Starting with Tamar, she was the wife of Er, who was the son of Judah. As Scripture records in Genesis 38, Er was evil in God's eyes, so God killed him. This meant Tamar was without a husband. So, according to the custom of the times, his brother Onan took Tamar to be his wife, but, he too was evil in God's eyes, so God killed him too. Since Judah had one more son, he should have become Tamar's husband, but, Judah was afraid to give him to Tamar lest he be killed also.

So, after many years of waiting for Judah to do what was right according to the tradition of her people, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced her father in law, Judah. As a result of their union, they produced a son, Perez, who is an ancestor of Jesus.

The next woman in Matthew's genealogy is Rahab. Her history is recorded in Joshua 2. From there we learn that Rahab was racially impure for she was a Canaanite woman. She was also a prostitute. And she was also a woman of faith.

And as a result of her faith, she hid the spies from the Jewish camp as they prepared to assault the Canaanite city of Jericho. After the fall of Jericho, Rahab was welcomed by the Israeli tribe, and she married a Hebrew man. Their son Boaz went on to become a wealthy man who was known for his integrity and devotion to God. His story is recorded in the book of the Bible named after his wife, Ruth, who is the third woman listed in Matthew's genealogy of Christ.

While the story of Boaz is important in the book of Ruth, Ruth's story is naturally the focus. Like Tamar, Ruth lost her husband early in life. Like Rahab, Ruth was racially impure as she belonged to the tribe Moab. Like Tamar and Rahab, Ruth had a strong faith. She also possessed exceptional virtue. After the death of her Jewish husband, she left her homeland and followed her mother-in-law' back to the land of Israel. Through her devotion to her mother-in-law and her exceptional character, Ruth earned a high reputation among the Jewish people and earned the respect of Boaz, who took her to be his wife. Together they had a son, whose name was Obed, who was the grandfather of King David.

The fourth woman in Matthew's genealogy of Christ is Bathsheba. Her story is found in 2 Samuel 11. From there we learn that she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was an honourable man, and a valiant soldier in the army of Israel.

We also learn that Bathsheba was a beautiful woman. So beautiful in fact, that King David, invited her to his palace, after he saw her bathing on her roof top, and, he got her pregnant. Afterwards, in an attempt to cover his sin, David arranged for the death of Uriah, and then married Bathsheba once he was dead. Through David and Bathsheba's union, King Solomon was born.

The final woman in Matthew's genealogy of Christ is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her story is found in the New Testament gospels. In the gospels we learn that Mary was a woman of exceptional virtue and faith. As a young virgin, engaged to Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth, she became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the child to whom she gave birth was Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man.

And these were the women's stories in Matthew's genealogy of the Christ. But what about the men? Which names stood out in your mind? As I read the list, I noted that many of the men listed were kings of Israel. And some of them were good, and some of them were bad.

Take for example, Uzziah and Josiah. Under Uzziah's fifty two year rule, the nation served God faithfully and prospered to a degree only known under king Solomon. Josiah was known for having the greatest zeal for God among any of the kings of Judah who had ever lived. Under his rule, he removed idol worship from the land, and turned the people back to worshiping God.

Among the bad kings were Ahaz and Manasseh. Rebelling against God, Ahaz closed down the Temple and removed its sacred elements. He also built many shrines to pagan gods. Manasseh was even worse than Ahaz. He heavily persecuted the prophets of God, brutally killing many of them. Manasseh built altars to foreign gods inside the Temple. The Bible says it was his evil ways that brought the judgement of God upon Jerusalem, so that the city and the temple were destroyed and the people were taken into exile in Babylon.

For better or for worse, this was the way of the kings of Israel. This was the way of Christ's family. And this is the way of our family, because Christ's family is our family. This is our family story.

And since this is our story, it is important that we know our history and understand our ancestry. Since this is our story, it is important that we take these trips down memory lane, as in these journeys to distant times and far away places we will find the plans and purposes of God for our lives; we will find the compass that points us in the right direction as we journey into the future.

And what insight and wisdom may we gain for our lives? From the stories of Christ's genealogy which we have recalled together, we are reminded that in our lives there will be bright points and there will be low points. There will be good memories and there will be

ones that we wish could be forgotten.

In much the same manner as Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares, we will journey through life and see good and evil co-existing in the world together, we will see good and evil co-existing in our families, and we will see good and evil co-existing in our lives.

And while we all may wish for a fairy tale world where such realities do not exist, that is not the world where Christ has called us to live. Instead, Christ has called us to be at home right in the midst of a conflicted world, right in the midst of a conflicted family - just as he chose to be when he came and lived among us.

This is the story of our past. And this is the story of our future until Christ returns. So as we live our lives in light of our history, let us celebrate the highs that God allows us to experience. Let us celebrate the victories of faith that God gives us, both great and small. Let us celebrate the virtue we may possess and strive to obtain the noble character of the saints like Mary, Ruth, Uzziah, and Josiah, and so many others who have walked the path before us.

And as we live our lives in light of our history, let us not get discouraged by the evil that we see around us or within us. Rather, let us walk in faith believing that Christ will separate the wheat from the tares on our behalf, for we are completely unable to accomplish this task.

Let us walk in faith believing that Christ is able to redeem the corruption in our character, the dysfunction in our families, the double mindedness in our lives, and whatever chaos a sinful world forces on us, and whatever harm our sinfulness forces on others.

For as Christ was able to work through a prostitute, an incestuous relationship, adultery, and murder; just as Christ was able to turn the cross into a symbol of victory, life, hope, and righteousness; so Christ is able to work through us and the circumstances of our lives and Christ will redeem every aspect of our history and every aspect of our lives according to His plans and purposes.

This is the hope that has been passed onto us. So as we look to the past, as we look through the photo album of our Christian family, as presented to us in Matthew's gospel, and throughout the pages of Scripture, may we hear the story of God's salvation and may we believe that what God has done for our family, God will do for us. As we hear the story of God's salvation, during the season of Advent, may the love of God fill our hearts, and may our voices be lifted towards heaven in praise.