

**The Family Tree**  
**December 2, 2012**  
**Matthew 1:1-17**

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

Genealogies don't seem all that important until someone starts telling stories... Years ago my mother's cousin put together a book family genealogy which concluded with my generation. Sitting at my mom's house one afternoon I started thumbing through the pages tracing my line up the family tree. I stopped on my uncle and counted five different wives. That got my mom telling stories about her black sheep brother and his adventures. I got to my grandmother's line and noticed something very odd. I knew she had brothers named Clarence and Orville but I couldn't figure out from all the diagrams why they had different last names. Clarence, the first born of his mother, took his mother's last name. The rest of the kids had their father's last name. When I asked my mom about it she told me a story about my great-grandmother.

My great-grandmother had an older sister who was married to a prominent man in Dallas Center. When this older sister had a baby, my great-grandmother went to live with her and help her with the baby. Somehow, while living with her sister, my great-grandmother, who was not married, got pregnant. The father was her sister's husband. This was around 1890 when being a single mom was not acceptable. At this point in the story I had lots of questions: Did everyone in town know he was the dad? Did he assault her or did they have an affair? Was she treated badly? My mom didn't know any of those answers. What she did know is that my great-grandmother had Clarence and gave him her maiden name...which makes me wonder if she was afraid to name the father and let it be known much later in life. In the day it was a scandalous way to come into the world...they had names for kids like that.

Once she started telling stories the names on the pages came to life. Suddenly, I was interested.

In looking over Matthew's recording of the genealogy of Jesus there are more than a few stories to be told. Matthew's genealogy is particularly odd because he includes the names of five women that have interesting stories attached to them. Women aren't generally included in genealogies but Matthew's genealogy is not typical.

Tamar had her father-in-law's twins, Rahab was a prostitute, Ruth seduced a man in the middle of the night, Bathsheba got pregnant with King David's child while she was still married to a guy named Uriah the Hittite, and finally Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

In case you are not familiar with some of these women I'll give you the highlights:

Tamar is the Canaanite wife of Judah's first born son. If it helps you to place Judah he was a brother to the Joseph who had the coat of many colors. Tamar's first husband died before she had a child. According to Jewish law, Judah had to give her his next son, Onan, so she could have the opportunity to produce an heir. Onan refused to impregnate her and because he refused he died (actually it says God struck him dead). So according to the law, Judah had to give his next son to Tamar – but he didn't want to because already he'd lost two sons and didn't want to risk another. That left Tamar without a child and without an heir. So she took matters into her own hands. Knowing Judah would be passing by she dressed up as a prostitute and sure enough he was interested in her services. He didn't have his wallet with him so he left his signet ring and a couple other personal items as collateral until he could pay her properly.

Tamar got pregnant...she wasn't married...she was publically shamed for her scandalous behavior and carried off to be executed for her infidelity. Judah was all for having her killed – he had no intention of risking another son to her. Just before she was about to be killed she revealed Judah's ring and other personal items and Judah was caught. The tables were suddenly turned and Judah had to confess to acquiring her services. He proclaimed to all that she was the righteous one, because he failed to care for her by giving her to his third son. She went on to have Perez and Zerah and Perez is named as the ancestor to King David.

Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute that lived in the city of Jericho. As the Israelites were entering the promised land they sent spies to Jericho to survey the city and determine their military strategy. Rahab risked her life to hide the spies from the King's soldiers. In return for her courage she and everyone in her household were spared on the day of the dreaded attack. She was celebrated as a hero and Matthew names her as the mother of Boaz in Jesus' family tree.

Ruth was a Moabite widow. In a time when many Israelites had to flee to the land of Moab, Ruth married an Israelite, but he died, and so did his brother, and so did his father. This left Naomi, an Israelite living in a foreign land, all alone with two foreign daughters-in-law. Naomi was compelled to return to her homeland and she released her daughters-in-law from any obligation to her but Ruth chose to remain with Naomi speaking those familiar words often spoken at weddings, "Wherever you go I will go, your people will be my people, your God will be my God." So Ruth went home with Naomi and she did her best to provide for Naomi by

following the harvesters around the fields and gleaning what grain she could. She caught the attention of an Israelite named Boaz and through an elaborately planned seduction won his affection and became his wife, thus securing a future for herself and Naomi. Ruth is listed as the great-grandmother of King David.

Bathsheba's name is not listed specifically in the genealogy, but when Matthew says, "the wife of Uriah the Hittite" we know he's talking about Bathsheba. Bathsheba is a silent character in her own story – she's just taking a bath on her roof – when David is home at the palace taking it easy. Meanwhile, Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, is faithfully serving David on the front lines of battle. David, being the most powerful king in Israel's history could have whatever he wanted and he wanted Bathsheba. When she turned up pregnant he tried to cover it up by getting Uriah home so the baby would appear to be Uriah's. When that didn't work David got Uriah back to the front lines and made sure he was killed. David then married Bathsheba and her child died. But she did conceive again and she did everything in her power to make sure her son, Solomon, became heir to David's throne.

That brings us to Mary.... Perhaps by now you are starting to notice that all of these women have somewhat salacious stories surrounding them. So by the time you get to Mary and you discover she is pregnant, not by the man she is engaged to, but by the Holy Spirit, it sounds tame in comparison.

Matthew structured his genealogy just this way to introduce us to Jesus. This is Jesus' family tree and the story this tree tells is that throughout salvation history outsiders – foreigners – (women no less!) proved to be more faithful than the Israelites around them. The conclusion we are left to draw is that Jesus, the Messiah, son of Abraham, son of David is for ALL people. Matthew says as much when he ends his gospel with Jesus giving the great commission, "Go, therefore into all the nations and make disciples..." It's hard for us to appreciate how scandalous this was in its day....but Matthew was writing to Jewish people who had a hard time accepting the fact that Gentiles were being welcomed as followers of Jesus. There is no room in the kingdom for self-righteous snobbery...all you have to do is look at Jesus' own family tree.

The message still speaks today – Jesus didn't come for a select few – but for all of us – all of us with sordid stories and scandalous history. It's not too different from the story Luke tells when he has an angel announcing Jesus' birth to stinky, outcast shepherds. The angel says, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people!" "Us? – you are bringing US good news of great joy?" "Yes, you...." (pointing to the congregation) and you, and you, and you, and you. Amen.