

## **The Mystery at the Manger: Whose Child Is This?**

**Matt 1:1-17**

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Here we are in December. The season of waiting has come. Children are waiting for Santa. Christians are waiting for Christ. Someone is waiting for a soldier to come home. All of us are waiting for something.

Waiting is hard for me. I spent my days in the hospital reading the Pentateuch, the ceremonial laws of Leviticus, the census counts of Numbers, the speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy. Some of the most boring pages of the Bible you can find, but you do that when all you are doing is just waiting and passing time. Then I found myself fumbling through Matthew's genealogy of Jesus – the first seventeen verses of Matthew that few of us read on the way to the great story of Christmas. It's been said no one gets a second chance to make a first impression. Either Matthew didn't know about first impressions or didn't care, for he opens his gospel with 41 names that are hard to pronounce and seldom read. Yet, among these characters I discovered a plot that I want to share with you during these waiting days of December.

### **The Genealogy of Jesus Christ**

#### **Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham**

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age, became a father. And so from this one man, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Today Abraham is the spiritual father of half the world, including Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Matthew begins the genealogy of Jesus by connecting him to Father Abraham, a man of faith that God counted as righteousness, said Paul.

Bruce Feiler in a book on Abraham, says "Abraham holds the key to our deepest fears and our possible reconciliation." This man whom God chose as a partner holds the key to our common understanding in a divisive world. Could he be right?

In a world where we talk about Jihad, terrorists, imperialists, Axis of Evil, and a war that just won't go away, what might happen if Christians, Muslims, and Jews, marched down to Mt. Hebron where Abraham is buried and said, "Wait a minute, we are all family here." While families may not always agree, they fare better when they refuse to fight. So let us here in the bosom of Abraham, lay our weapons down, and say once more to all the world that we have more to gain by being kin to one another than we do in killing one another. Children of Abraham have more in common than they have apart and I have a sneaking suspicion that the world is yearning for an understanding like that. Jesus Christ the Son of Abraham.

### **Jesus Christ, the Son of David**

All of us would like a little royalty in our heritage. Queen Elizabeth reportedly said at some point that she would like her son Charles to marry a woman with a history not a past. People constantly ask me - are you kin to the famous R.E. Olds who founded the Olds Motor Vehicle Company in 1897, opened a manufacturing plant in Lansing, Michigan and later sold it to General Motors? I take a long look and say, "I wish."

### **Jesus Christ was the Son of David.**

Before we handle this Child too lightly, treat Him too carelessly, ignore Him too quickly, we best remember what royalty has made Himself known to us. Even as the Wise Men came seeking Him, Herod feared Him, Pilate was perplexed by Him, so we need to remember this Christmas that we celebrate the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Savior of the world, the Lord omnipotent who shall reign forever and ever. We bow before a King. We come to worship the Lord of lords. Ponder that in your prayers. Remember that the next time you come to church or feel tempted to skip church. Christ the King is born; the best we can do is to fall on our knees, bow our weary heads and worship him, the Lord of all, Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham.

### **Jesus Christ, the Son of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba**

We slide over these names like water over a rock on a cold winter day. But we are not Jews. The gospel of Matthew was written for the Jews. Any Jew reading this genealogy would stop dead in his tracks right here. Women didn't make genealogies in the Old Testament. Remember when Jesus fed the multitude, there were 5,000 men not counting women and children. Women and children didn't count.

Matthew did not name matriarchs: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael – instead we get Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. Tamar posed as a prostitute in order to get pregnant by her father-in-law, Judah. Rahab was a prostitute who sheltered the spies sent by Joshua to scout out Jericho. Ruth was a Moabite who was treated worse than lepers by Jews. Bathsheba gave in to David's lust and participated in the cover-up plot to kill her husband. This is not a very pretty list that we have here included in the genealogy of Jesus.

An American family hired a genealogist to research their family tree. Like most families, a skeleton appeared in the closet. A great uncle by the name of Zach had been convicted of murder, held on death row, and executed in an electric chair. The family said to the researcher, could you tweak the story a bit to make it less embarrassing? Here is what he wrote:

“Uncle Zach worked for the Department of Justice for a number of years, after which he was given a chair in applied electronics at a well-known government institution. He became quite attached to it, held there by very strong ties until eventually he died. His death came as quite a shock.”

There is no cleaning up required in the ancestry of Jesus. He came for Gentiles as well as Jews, for sinners as surely as saints, for the down and out as well as the up and out. That is why we call him Savior. Whatever your heritage you can come to Him just as you are. You need not wait to give up the jug, nor clean up your act, nor erase your history. Christ the Savior is born. He wants to be your Savior today.

### **Jesus Christ, the Son of Joseph**

As Max Lucado spins the story, Joseph was perched firmly on his branch of the family tree. It was thick, reliable, and perfect for sitting. It was so strong he didn't tremble when the storms came, nor did he shake when the wind blew. This branch was predictable, solid, and Joseph had no intention of leaving it – until he was told in a dream to go out on a limb – not even a limb, a dangling, quivering twig, and take Mary to be his wife even though she was pregnant by some mysterious source. Common sense said, ‘How could he?’ Self-defense said, ‘Why bother?’ Self-respect said, ‘What will others think?’ The Bible said, “Stone her.”

Joseph was a righteous man, which means he does the right thing regardless of the cost. So Mary becomes his wife while he takes cold showers to preserve her virginity. Jesus becomes his son while he contributes no sperm and not a trace of DNA can be found. What makes a father, anyway? Is it some sexual act in the heat of the night, or a righteous man who gives a family a home and takes his son each day to the carpenter shop teaching him life as well as a trade? Is it not a real father whose son dares to stand up and say one day ‘God is like my Daddy who taught me to measure twice and cut once back in that carpenter shop years ago.’

Jesus is born of the house and lineage of Joseph who was the husband of Mary. So completes the lineage of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph, 42 generations of which Matthew can only remember 41. Well maybe not. There is another name used throughout the Bible for Jesus the Christ. He is often called the Son of Man.

### **Jesus Christ, the Son of Man**

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, ‘The Son of God became the Son of Man to enable the sons of men to become the sons of God.’

*Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20).*

*The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).*

*The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).*

*The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6).*

*Who do you say the Son of Man is?*

A mother received a new DVD player from her son for Christmas. She was appreciative of the gift. But she confided in a friend. What I really need is my son to come, because I do not have a clue on how to hook the thing up! As I waded through the days of waiting, I discovered that I did not need the benefits of Jesus, I needed Jesus. I needed Him every hour. And when I had Jesus, he was all I needed.

This Christmas may the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of Tamar, the Son of Rahab, the Son of Ruth, the Son of Bathsheba, the Son of Joseph, indeed, the Son of us all – come to us with broken body and spilled blood with healing in His wings.