

“Jesus’ Ancestry.com”

Matthew 1:1-17

ADVENT 3

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One commercial among many this holiday season
stands out to me- Ancestry.com.

For the introductory holiday gift offer of \$59.00,
(Forty dollars off the regular price)
you can join the 20 million people
who have deepened their family story.

Morning show host and South Jersey native
Kelly Ripa traced her family lineage
back to a small Italian town and
to an ancestor who made macaroni.

Kelly Ripa tells perspective buyers
Ancestry.com DNA testing will reveal
the people and places you’re from and more.

Reaching into more than 350 regions around
the world, Ancestry.com provides more detail
than any other DNA background text.

I went online to Ancestry.com and discovered
it to be a Utah-based private company
that has access to 10 billion historical records.
Ancestry.com helps clients to trace their
genealogy, providing them with a
family tree that takes them back many
generations.

Ancestry.com also connects its customers
with living relatives who share your DNA,
and traces how and even why families
moved from place to place.

Speaking of genealogies and family trees,
we just heard the reading from Jesus’
genealogy that opens Matthew’s gospel.

Matthew begins his gospel with a title:

“The birth record or the account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David and the son of Abraham” (1:1)

Writing for mainly a Jewish Christian audience some time shortly after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D., Matthew’s readers who knew Hebrew scripture were immediately reminded of similar passages from the Torah’s first book-Genesis, especially chapters two, five, and six.

The closest of these in wording to Matthew’s opening passage is that of Genesis 5:1 which reads: “This is the record of the genesis (or descendants) of Adam.” The purpose of this introduction is the narration of the Noah story as Matthew’s genealogy begins the narration of the Jesus story.

The genealogy in Genesis chapter five leads from Adam to Noah, for the genealogy of Adam is a genealogy of his descendants, while the genealogy of Jesus is a genealogy of his ancestors.

According to early Christians theology there can be no genealogy of Jesus’ descendants because God’s salvation history reaches its goal or climax in the person of Jesus.

Besides fitting the record of birth that appears in verses two through seventeen, Matthew with his emphasis on Jesus the Messiah or the Christ and on “the son of David” and “the son of Abraham” calls the reader’s attention to the basic themes of not only Matthew’s infancy narrative but also his entire gospel.

As some of you who attended the bible

study on Matthews gospel heard me point out repeatedly- the name “Jesus Christ” serves as a theological statement that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hopes.

The sonship of David will be the special theme of Matthew’s first chapter, for not only is the Davidic theme crystal clear in the genealogy, but it reappears in next week’s reading in the angelic revelation to Joseph who is addressed as “son of David” (1:20).

It is important in Matthew’s birth account that Joseph, a descendant from David, accepts and names Jesus as his son.

The theme of “the son of Abraham” is more subtle.

Another major theme throughout Matthew’s gospel is the coming of Gentiles to Jesus through his authoritative teaching and healings

Commenting on the faith of a Roman centurion later in chapter eight, Matthew will record Jesus saying: “I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (8:11).

In Matthew’s third chapter, when the Pharisees and Sadducees are presumed to claim “we have Abraham as our father (3:9), Jesus warns them that God is able to raise up new children to Abraham.

Thus, for Matthew, the designation of Jesus as “son of Abraham” may indicate that he is the seed and descendant of Abraham by whom all nations of the world will be blessed.

Thus will be fulfilled in the second chapter of Matthew’s infancy narrative when the magi or wise men, who are clearly meant to be Gentiles come to pay homage and

worship the kind of the Jews.

As our birth certificates, Social Security cards,
and drivers licenses serve the purpose of
establishing our identity in today's world,
the genealogy of Jesus also provided
proof of his identity and place in
Judea's first century world.

A genealogy told others a person's
ethnic origin, family ancestor, and
the places where they inhabited.

For them, it was a good as Ancestry.com
From Matthew's genealogy we learn there are
forty-two generation from Abraham to Jesus.

Matthew presents this genealogy to varyity
Jesus' pedigree and to interpret theologically
that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.

As his gospel unfolds, Matthew presents Jesus
as an authorized teacher of the law
and the prophets.

Matthew, also, will make reference to the
ancient Hebrew scripture to demonstrate how
Jesus fulfills what Scripture predicted.

Looking at Matthew's genealogy of Jesus,
there are both some impressive ancestors
as well as some surprises.

This brings to my mind the parents of
one of my childhood's close friends-
Bob Matthews, who is now retired and
living in Newcastle in Northern England.

Back around the time Bob and I were
sixth graders at Central School in
Springfield, PA, his parents decided
to have their family history researched.

This was back in 1960 when there
was no Ancestry.com

Talk about surprises.

I can still remember the shock that

registered on his parents' faces as they read that included in their family genealogies were a crooked tax collector who was tarred and feathered along with a house thief who was hanged.

Jesus' family tree was not without surprises.

There are the predictable and prestigious progenitors such as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. and a list of Davidic kings including Solomon the wise and Josiah the Reformer.

Like my friend's family genealogy, there are some entries that one would want to ignore or forget like Manasseh, Judah's worst king and Jeconiah, the puppet king, whose defeat led to Judah's defeat and the deportation of exiles to Babylon, a time in their family history Jews wanted to put out of their minds because it reminded them of their present Roman occupation.

As you can see, Matthew's genealogy highlights Israel's greatest moments and her darkest days.

Another strange listing in Matthew's genealogy are the four women who appear unexpectedly in an otherwise patriarchal family tree.

These women would have immediately caught the attention of Matthew's original audience.

What might Matthew be highlighting by including these particular four women?

Some have suggested that Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba reflect an Old Testament story that hints of impropriety, thus preparing the reader for the unusual circumstances surrounding Mary's pregnancy.

St. Jerome, the fourth century compiler of the Bible that bears his name even suggested that all four women are the sinners of

Matthew's genealogy, but there many listed males who also qualify for that category.

More likely, Matthew includes these women in his genealogy to plant the seeds for Jesus' own mission to the Gentiles, since Tamar and Rahab are Canaanites, Ruth is a Moabite, and Bathsheba was married to Uriah the Hittite, another Gentile.

If so, these women are not connected to many in the genealogy (1: 16) but rather to a handful of Gentiles who appear in Matthew's gospel to signal God's inclusion in the coming kingdom of heaven.

Matthew also makes it clear that Jesus is the offspring of Mary, but he does not connect Jesus biologically to Joseph.

Matthew will solve this so-called conundrum in Jesus' birth story next week by accenting Joseph's choice to name Jesus and adopt him legally as his son (1: 18-25)

Rabbi Harold Kushner recalls a Hasidic tale of a man who received a telegram from a rabbi informing him that a relative had died and left him some valuable property.

Eager to claim his inheritance, the man rushed into the rabbi's office, only to learn that the relative was Moses and the valuable property was his Jewish heritage

For Jesus and for the rest of us, God shapes us distinctively by the promises made at baptism.

This morning Colton and Walker were made a part of God's ongoing salvation history.

By virtue of their baptisms, Colton the Rock and Walker the Stone will be listed in our parish record and in God's book of life.

Beloved people of God,
by prefacing the story of Jesus with
such a rich and ridiculous genealogy,
Matthew sets the stage for
the rich and ridiculous power of the gospel.

The good news is that God creates us
out of our history in order to
re-create us for the future.

Our past births us-but it does not control us.
We are baptized into God's future
as new creations and creatures in Christ,
where the past is finished and gone,
and the new has come.
Thanks be to God.

Amen