

THE PEOPLE OF CHRISTMAS: THE FAMILY TREE

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Date: December, 14 2013

Did you know that both Luke and Matthew begin their gospels with a long genealogy of Jesus? Matthew begins with Abraham and goes all the way to Joseph, Jesus' earthly father. Luke's genealogy is in chapter 4, and Luke traces the line all the way back to Adam. The Matthew genealogy always captures my attention because the line's composed of folks most of us know pretty well: Abraham, whose impatience with God's timing is still causing problems today; Judah, a rascal if there ever was one; David, whose psalms of praise and faith still move us, even as we're shocked by the complete mess he made of his personal life; David's son, Solomon – he of the literally hundreds of wives and concubines.

There are 5 women in Matthew's genealogy: Tamar, who seduced her father-in-law; Ruth, the initially pagan foreigner from Moab; Rahab, prostitute and foreigner; Bathsheba, one of King David's many wives – and finally Mary. Out of them all, Mary was the only "good girl" – Jewish, devout, innocent.

All the other folks on the genealogy, both male and female, are mostly just like us: sinful, often weak, disobedient at times. I'm always amazed at the people God uses to do his work in the world. And this task, especially – when the Son of God is born on earth, couldn't we have done better with some well-behaved people? But that's never been God's way. It's God, and us, working together. He'll take care of our sinful nature – our job is to show up and be obedient. It's just amazing what God can do with a bunch of well-meaning sinners.

At Stockbridge Presbyterian, families and singles take turns lighting the Advent Candle for that particular Sunday. The best family group I ever saw was one where a family of probably 7 people came up together to light the candle and between them, there were 4 last names. There'd been divorces, deaths, estrangements, step-siblings, reconciliations – sounds like a family, right? What I loved was that regardless of last names or disagreements, these folks are a family. They love God, they love each other, and they felt so blessed to be able to serve God together in this way.

And I thought – some things never change. If God waited for only sinless people to carry out his will, he'd be waiting forever. Even the Savior's genealogy is overflowing with people whose weaknesses, shortcomings, and rebellion just make us shake our heads. It's still that way today. God's not necessarily looking for children/servants who are perfect and holy. God's looking for us, warts and all. And if he wants us to do something, he'll equip us to do it whether our behavior is all that righteous or not. It's not about good behavior; it's about loving God, and being faithful.

Please don't try and wait till you're all done sinning so that then you'll be "good enough" to serve God. Thanks to Jesus, you're good enough right now, and imperfect and sinless as we are, God loves us and has made us part of his plan for eternity.