MEET THE ANCESTORS

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. 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.

So, you might think I’ve lost the plot slightly having just chosen to read that gospel reading and now deliberately choosing to preach on it.

We’re starting a series on Matthew running to the end of March when the Dean will preach on the resurrection of Jesus and in between we’ll have a series of snapshots of the life of Jesus and I’d like to think the question throughout this term might be: what is all the fuss about? Or, what is it about Jesus that 2000 odd years later some people are still interested in him? Other people at the time claimed to be the Messiah (he didn’t as it happened) but they’ve mostly faded from the history books. Others have come along since and claimed to be important religious figures or their followers have made the claims for them, and some are still going strong, others aren’t but something about Jesus still interests us.
Bizarre news item: I googled Jesus in news and came up with:

**MY BABY LOOKS LIKE JESUS' ON ULTRASOUND**  
*Mom dreams of Messiah while pregnant claims she can see Him*  
*An Argentinian woman, who said she had dreamed of Jesus Christ while pregnant, claims her ultrasound of her unborn child appears to show the face of the Messiah. The woman has only been identified by her first name Fanny, gave birth to her daughter, Alfonsia.*

It did come from the Daily Mail. And, to be honest, it didn’t look like Jesus to me. We don’t have ‘my baby looks like Julius Caesar’ articles in the daily mail. Actually, I rarely read the Mail so, we might do.

But assuming we don’t, what is it about Jesus? And that is what all four gospel writers are trying to do in their own way? For Matthew it is something to do with what is it about Jesus from an early Jewish Christian perspective?

And for a Jewish audience the first thing is who was his dad and his granddad and his great granddad? And certainly for the Jewish audience of Matthew’s time which tribe does he belong to. And the Interesting thing here – Matthew goes for Joseph’s ancestors while if you turn to Luke he goes for Mary’s. And maybe we could think of the differences in some ways as a Jewish account as opposed to a gentile account.

For the Jewish communities genealogies are important as they are linked to property rights – for instance every 50 years you could claim land handed out to your tribe when they first settled in Israel (issues today arise from this)

If you didn’t know your genealogy you didn’t know who you were. And knowing someone else’s genealogy gives you an insight into them.

It is worth noting on passing the practice of what’s called “genealogical abridgment” where generations are missed out to show a basic line of ancestry. So the 14 generations to… is not I think a literal 14 generations but is one of those numbers. 7 for some reason indicates a sense completeness, something to do with creation and 14 probably has the sense of a long time: 14 to David, 14 to Babylon, 14 to Joseph. All saying it’s a long time.

But the key thing to my mind is it is in one sense very much a planned thing. It is all part of God’s planning, timing and sequence; God is in charge, which makes the genealogy very interesting.
The other interesting thing is that there are women mentioned. In usual genealogies the male line is noted, and it seems rather odd to mention women in a patriarchal society as the power isn't there.

All very interesting you might say. The important thing is it tells us where Jesus comes from, who he is. And interestingly here is not just the son of God which is what we might expect to see. But he is part of a human family and has a heritage that means something.

Interestingly of course this is as I’ve already said Joseph’s ancestry, but the observant amongst you might notice that Christian teaching says that Joseph is not his dad, just sort of his step adoptive parent. God’s his dad. But the important thing in Jewish law is that notion of being part of the family. He is of the family and line of Joseph and thus he can trace that line to Abraham (nothing special there as that’s true for all Jews and indeed it could be argued all people according to the scriptures)

But Jesus can trace back to David: King David the great paragon of virtue and his son Solomon and so fulfil all those prophecies about the line of David.

And then it gets interesting: the wife of Uriah, maybe not the paragon of virtue after all. Jesus is born into a family of adulterers. Remember we are told in the scriptures God planned Jesus birth and therefore this genealogy.

So let’s look a few examples form the genealogy of who is part of God’s plan

Tamar (Genesis 38:6-30)
Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah. She was a childless widow, who was given to her brother-in-law after her husband's death. By this marriage, her offspring would continue the name and inheritance of the deceased. Unfortunately, Tamar's brother-in-law refused to have proper intercourse with her, and he died. Afterwards, Judah would not give Tamar to any of his other sons. So Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and Judah, her father in law, paid a goat for her services. And then was planning to have her killed at first for bringing disrepute onto the family for being a prostitute – then found out she was the prostitute he’d had sex with. Through him, she became the mother of Perez.

Gods planned genealogy

Ruth (Ruth 1:1-4:22)
Ruth was a foreigner from the land of Moab. She was the widow of a Jew. Her mother-in-law, Naomi, also lived in Moab. Naomi journeyed to Israel after her family died. Ruth's devotion was extraordinary. She left her own country to follow Naomi. While in Israel, Ruth was married to Boaz, one of Naomi's relatives. Ruth
later became the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David the King. A foreigner, not even pure Jewish blood

Gods planned genealogy

Rahab (Joshua 2:1-24)
And even more interesting Rahab who was a prostitute and a foreigner. Rahab was a prostitute who lived in Jericho. She hid the spies of Joshua. Because of this, the Israelites spared her life when they conquered Jericho. She later became the wife of Salmon, and the mother of Boaz. Rahab's faith was later commended (Heb 11:30-31).

Gods planned genealogy

And it seems get even more interesting…

The wife of Uriah the Hittite, who is called Bathsheba, although not in this genealogy (2 Samuel 11:1-27)
Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was a soldier in the army of King David. She and David had an adulterous affair. When David discovered Bathsheba was pregnant, he tried to cover it up by summoning Uriah home from war, hoping that Uriah would have sex with his wife. Uriah came home to Jerusalem, but refused to lay with Bathsheba as long as the armies of Israel were at war. So, David sent Uriah back into battle, with orders to ensure Uriah was at the front of the fighting and got killed. David took Bathsheba as his own wife. Bathsheba later became the mother of Solomon.

Gods planned genealogy

And, of course this all leads finally to a teenage single mum Mary.

Interesting? But what is the point of all this?

Perhaps that God is not ashamed of human fallen-ness and sinfulness. And, indeed that he is delighted and proud to be involved in all of humanity. That no-one is unacceptable to God. That Jesus as God came to be part of ordinary humanity in all its embarrassing splendour, fallen-ness and awkwardness. There are a heck of a lot of skeletons in Jesus’ ancestral cupboard, which makes my great, great granddad look like a saint.

Matthew is stating right at the beginning that God in the midst of us. God involved in an intimate way with messy humanity in all their/our joys and sorrows and triumphs and disasters. God pitching his tent among us is how John describes it in his prologue.
In the Message version of the Scriptures (which is very American in one way) it says:

14 The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

I hope and pray we might see that Glory - like Father, like Son. The glory: the character and personality of God as we look at Jesus in action this term through the narrative of Matthew’s gospel.

But, also, see God as Jesus hanging out with humanity. Showing us how God acts towards humans like you and me. With overwhelming acceptance and love. And, incredible demands.

And, that he can involve anyone. Even the most unexpected in his plans.

Hopefully we will see more of this through the term.

Amen

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