

Text: Matthew 1:1-17

**Title: “A New Creation”**

I love this time of the year! Yes, it can become a bit hectic. Nevertheless, the Advent-Christmas season is my favourite time of the year. Partly because of all the festivity: the sights, the sounds, the food, the parades, the twinkle in children’s eyes, their eager sense of anticipation. It is, as an old song says, “The most wonderful time of the year.”

But the Advent-Christmas season is my favourite principally because the spot-light shines where it ought to shine every season of the year. And when it shines, the shining raises the most fundamental question of the Christian faith. Indeed, given the answers to the question, the Advent-Christmas season raises the most important question any human being can ever asked.

I love this time of year because the spotlight shines on Jesus. And raises the question again, “So who is He?”

I was standing in line at the market the other night, and heard the question being sung throughout the store: “What child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary’s lap is sleeping?” Then standing in line at the coffee shop the next morning, I heard: “A Child, a child, sleeping in the night, He will bring us goodness and light.” “Yes!” I wanted to shout. And was wishing it were part of a “flash mob”.....where from all over the store people would break out singing: “King of kings, and Lord of lords...and He shall reign forever and ever.”

Who is He? Whose coming inspires such magnificent music? This child held so tenderly in the young virgin’s arms. So vulnerable. So very vulnerable. Who is He?

A number of people who experienced first hand the event of the first Advent-Christmas tell us who they think Jesus is. Thus, during this season, we turn to the apostle John, one of the first disciples of Jesus. The one who, more than the others, chose to enter into the intimate friendship Jesus promises all who follow Him. John begins his Advent-Christmas story: “In the beginning was the WORD. And the WORD was with God. And the WORD was God.....And the WORD became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1,14). We will take time to listen to John in the meditation in the Christmas Eve services.

During the Advent-Christmas season, we also turn to Luke, the medical doctor, who put his scientific training to work, thoroughly recording all that was being written about Jesus, composing his own eloquent, full-of-the-compassion-of-Jesus Gospel. We will hear from Luke in nearly every service this season, reading parts of Luke 1 and 2. “Now it came about in those days that Caesar Augustus.....and shepherds were in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night....and suddenly....” (2:1,8,9).

And during the Advent-Christmas season we turn to Matthew, the tax-collector-turned-evangelist, who along with John, was one of the first disciples of Jesus. Who put his accounting skills to work gathering from Jesus’ words and deeds into meticulously organized “files,” if you will. Matthew’s Gospel is, of them all, the most carefully arranged.

One day, Matthew was sitting in his tax office, “doing the books”. Jesus, then an adult, walks in. And says, “Come, follow me.” Matthew puts down his pencil, stands up, and begins the journey of a life-time.

And a few years down the road, applies all his accounting skills to the task of understanding and then declaring who Jesus is.

Chinelo...please come and read for us the opening ledger of Matthew’s Advent-Christmas story.

Pray: Open our eyes that we may see. Open our ears that we may hear. Amen.

I can see from the look on some of your faces that some of you think “oh dear do we really have to take time to read this text?” Raymond Brown, in his monumental work “The Birth of the Messiah”, writes: “To the modern readers there are a few things in the Bible less meaningful than the frequent lists of descendants or ancestors”. (pg 64) You would most certainly not find this text printed on Holiday greeting cards. What a strange and, on first reading, boring way to begin the greatest story ever told.

But to the Jewish mind it was the most natural and most significant way to begin the greatest story ever told. For if you know a person’s personal pedigree you know the person. In fact, you did not know the person unless you knew his or her pedigree. This was especially the case when one was being considered for the position of priest or King. (see Ezra 2:62-63; Nehemiah 7:64-65). Candidates had to be able to demonstrate that they were pure Jews. William Barclay notes that “a priest for instance, was bound to produce an unbroken record of his pedigree, stretching back to Aaron; and if he married, the woman he married must produce her pedigree for at least five generations back” (*Matthew*, pg. 12). So important was this matter of genealogies that one of the major tasks of the Sanhedrin (the ruling body of Israel) was to keep the genealogical records safe. Herod the Great, whom the Jews despised, was not a pure Jew. He was half Edomite. Herod knew this and had the official register destroyed so “no one could prove a purer pedigree than his own” (ibid).

What is Matthew telling us about Jesus in the way he presents Jesus’ pedigree?

Clearly, Matthew is claiming that Mary’s child is the Jewish Messiah, the anointed one, the Christ. And the Jewish mind would have gotten that claim right away. Although the Jewish mind would have been shocked by four other names that appear in the pedigree... a fact we will work with in a few moments. Matthew writes his genealogy to show that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.

But the Jewish mind would have heard Matthew making an even more startling claim. This more startling claim is made in the first two words Matthew writes: They are “book... genesis” (1:1). That is literally how the tax-collector-turned-evangelist begins his introduction to his Advent Christmas story: “book... genesis”; “book ... genesis... Jesus Christ”.

Genesis. Genesis. What does Matthew want us to see? The words he uses, *biblios geneseos*, are intended to take our minds back to two well known passages of the Old Testament: Genesis 2:4

and Genesis 5:1 (so B. Beasley-Murray, *Matthew*, p. 17). In the Greek version, Genesis 2:4 reads, *Biblios geneseos* – “the book of the genesis of heaven and earth”; Genesis 5:1 reads, *Biblios geneseos* – “the book of the genesis of Adam”. In both cases what is then described in “the book of the genesis of ...” is a creative work of God; God bringing into being that which did not previously exist.

What is Matthew declaring in his opening words? That what follows is the story of a whole new creative work of God! *Biblios geneseos*. The pedigree that follows does not simply describe a nice little Jewish boy born to a nice Jewish couple on star-filled night. The pedigree that follows describes the beginning of a second Genesis. The birth of this child inaugurates a new era for humanity and the world (D. Hill, *Matthew*, 74). What Matthew is declaring in his opening words is that the child is the New Creation, the New Adam, the New Humanity. “The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ.”

This startling claim made at the beginning of the pedigree is sounded with greater force at the end. Listen again to how Matthew puts it. Listen carefully. “The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah...” And on it goes “D the father of E, E the father of F, ...” until we come to the end. Listen carefully. “Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ.” Did you hear the break in the cadence? Not: X the father of Y, Y the father of Z, Z the father of Jesus who is called Christ. But: X the father of Y, Y the father of Z, Z *the husband of Mary* of whom was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

The point? The Advent Christmas Child, although very human, comes into being in an extraordinary way. Although he comes through humanity, he is not produced by humanity. Although Jesus Christ comes from the womb of a human being, he is not begotten by a human being. This is a new and different act of God!! As new and as unique and as unprecedented as the first genesis. The child born of Mary is a brand new creative work of God!

This Matthew develops more fully in the paragraph following the pedigree (which we will begin to work with next Sunday). There, by referring to the Holy Spirit as the agent of Jesus’ conception, he takes us back to Genesis where the Spirit hovers over the face of the deep, bringing forth this new creation (1:2)

“Book ... genesis. . Jesus Christ.”... “the book of the genesis of Jesus Christ.” Mary’s child is the new creation! Which is why it is so right that history be demarcated the way that it is. BC – AD. In His conception and birth, the living God began the story of the new creation.

Now, as Jewish readers worked their way through the pedigree, they were struck by two other facts. The first is the way Matthew uses the names Abraham and David. The second is the fact that Matthew includes the names of four women in addition to Mary, Jesus’ mother. Each of these facts tells us something very important about the nature of this new creation.

1. Matthew writes: “the book of the genesis of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham” (1:1). Son of David, Son of Abraham. In that one line Matthew has announced incredibly

good news! Some 1,750 years before the first Advent, God made a tremendous promise to Abraham. Some 750 years later, or 1,000 years before the first Advent, God made another tremendous promise to David.

To Abraham God promised: “I will greatly bless you and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 22:17-18).

Take special note of that phrase, “in your seed all the nations... all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” Abraham does not even have a clue as to how big the earth is or how many nations inhabit it. Yet to him God promises that someday, a seed, a child, a son of his would bless all the nations.

Now it very soon became clear, that Isaac, Abraham and Sarah’s first son, would not fulfill that world impacting promise. And it soon became clear that Isaac’s son, Jacob, would not fulfill it either. So it went... generation after generation.

Thus a dominant question became, “who is this seed, this Son of Abraham, in whom all the nations, all families, of the earth will be blessed?”

To David God made another world-impacting promise. God said: “When your days are complete and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your seed after you, one who will come forth from you and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name and I will establish his kingdom forever.” (2 Samuel 7:12-13) Take special note of that twice-repeated phrase: “I will establish his kingdom forever.” God promises David a child who would reign over an everlasting kingdom.

Now, at first it appeared that David’s son Solomon would fulfill this world-impacting promise. But Solomon began to lose his way, morally and spiritually. And when Solomon died, the kingdom of David split into two smaller and weaker kingdoms; the Northern and Southern Kingdom, Israel and Judah. And each successive “son of David” seemed less and less likely to rule over an everlasting kingdom.

So another dominant question arose: “Who is this Son of David who will reign over an everlasting kingdom?”

Try to hear and see the opening verse of the New Testament with the ears and eyes of first century Jews. Try to feel what they felt when they read “the book of the genesis of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham.” Can it really be He has finally come? The long-awaited seed? Here He is! The One in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed! Here He is! The King whose reign of justice and shalom will know no end!!

We are, therefore, not to be surprised when as we read the rest of the story we hear Mary’s child speaking in terms of a kingdom which embraces and transforms all the nations of the world. We are not surprised that Matthew’s gospel ends the way it does. The Risen Jesus

says “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” (28:18-19)

“All authority” – of course! He is the Son of David. “All the nations” – of course, He is the Son of Abraham.

What *does* surprise us is the way Jesus, Son of David, Son of Abraham, speaks of David and Abraham. Jesus, Son of David, asks, “Why does David call his son ‘Lord’?” (Matthew 22:41-46) Jesus, Son of Abraham claimed, “before Abraham was, I Am.” (John 8:58). The promised Son of David, Son of Abraham, turns out to be the eternal Son of God, God the Son, to whom David and Abraham owe every beat of their hearts.

Who is He? This Advent Child? This Christ child? The New Creation who is the fulfillment of promise! The apostle Paul would later make the logical deduction that Jesus is therefore the guarantee of the fulfillment of the rest of God’s promise. “As many as may be the promises of God, in Christ they are yes.” (2 Corinthians 1:20) The birth of Mary’s child, the seed of David, of Abraham, is God’s assurance to the world that God will do everything else God has promised!!

The first thing, then, that struck the first readers of Matthew’s pedigree of Jesus is the use of the names Abraham and David. The second thing that struck them is even more exciting!

Matthew includes the names of four women... four women in addition to Mary in Jesus’ pedigree. (Vs. 3) Tamar, the mother of Perez and Zerah; (vs. 5) Rahab, the mother of Boaz; (vs. 5) Ruth, the mother of Obed; and (vs. 6) “the wife of Uriah”, Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon.

Now this fact is truly amazing! For in the first century women’s names were not ordinarily included in genealogical tables. Women had no legal rights or status. A woman was, in legal terms, simply a man’s property.

So what would be gained by including women in one’s genealogy, in a document whose purpose is to establish a man’s reputation? Why would you put a woman’s name in that kind of document? In the pedigree of the New Creation, we find in addition to His mother’s name, the name of four women!

What is further amazing about this fact is that three of these four women were foreigners, not pure-Jews: Tamar was a Canaanite, Rahab a Jerichoite, Ruth a Moabite, and Bathsheba, although a Jew by birth, was technically no longer so, for through her marriage to Uriah, she became a Hittite. Here in the gene-pool of the New Creation are these Gentiles. Gentiles!

What is even more amazing is that three of the four women had done morally questionable things (to say the least!). Tamar had seduced her father-in-law Judah, and was an adulteress (see Genesis 38). Rahab was a prostitute (see Joshua 2:1-7). Bathsheba had an affair with King David (see 2 Samuel 11). Which is why Matthew does not call her by name. Matthew calls her “the wife of Uriah,” that is, not the lawful wife of David. Matthew can’t even bring

himself to say the name Bathsheba. Matthew does not like the woman (K. Bailey) because she messes up David's life. And Ruth, although herself morally upright, as a Moabite was a descendent of incestuous Lot (Genesis 19). It was said that "no Moabite shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord... even to the tenth generation" (Deuteronomy 23:3). And yet a Moabite woman is in the pedigree of Jesus the Messiah, the New Genesis!

"Why bring on the ladies?" asks Raymond Brown (*Spirit*, p. 71). Because bringing on the ladies reveals the nature of the new creation. Bringing on the ladies reveals the heart of Him who is the new creation.

Specifically, the inclusion of the four ladies in Jesus' pedigree tells us that the New Creation overcomes all the barriers which divide the old creation. In the New Creation, all the walls of the old come down!

The inclusion of the ladies says that Jesus Christ overcomes the barrier between male and female. It may have been unusual for women to be included in the genealogy of the men of the old order, but it is not unusual for women to be included in the genealogy of The Man of the new order.

Right from the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew signals that he makes more explicit a the rest unfolds; namely, that to Jesus Christ women are not pieces of property, but persons. Jesus Christ, the New Creation, gives women dignity. Unlike the rabbis of His day, Jesus talked to women "in public" no less. Unlike the rabbis of His day, Jesus welcomed women into His entourage. As one New Testament scholar notes, "This was an unprecedented happening in the history of that time... Jesus knowingly overthrew custom when he allowed women to follow Him." (Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 376). Of course – it is a new day; the new genesis has begun! Unlike the rabbis of His day, Jesus allowed women to sit at His feet to receive His teaching. And unlike the rabbis of His day, Jesus chose women to be His representatives, to be the bearers of His Gospel (See John 4; 10:11-18; Luke 24:10). The New Creation breaks down the wall... and grants women full participation in the Kingdom of God!

The inclusion of the ladies in His pedigree also says that Jesus Christ overcomes the barrier between Jew and Gentile. There was no greater racial-ethnic barrier. Jewish genealogies were written to prove that one was free of Gentile contamination. Yet there they are! Gentiles in the pedigree of the New Creation. Gentile blood runs in the veins of the Jewish Messiah!!!

Right from the beginning of his gospel Matthew signals that he also makes clear as the rest unfolds: Jesus Christ comes for all peoples. So my friend Dale Bruner can write, "Matthew wants the church to know that from the start, and not just from the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), God's Work has been interracial, and that God is no narrow naturalist or racist." The New Creation reaches over the barriers and brings different races together in Him. Interracial, multi-cultural blood flows in the veins of the Son of David, Son of Abraham.

The inclusion of the ladies also announces the coming down of yet another wall, the biggest, tallest, thickest wall of all. Jesus Christ overcomes the barrier between the Holy God and unholy humanity. All four women are unholy sinners. Yet here they are in the pedigree of the Holy One, the Sin-less One! The four women are of course not the only sinners in the list. Every man in this list is a sinner! Abraham was hardly a saint, the same is true of Isaac and Jacob and Judah. After all, Tamar was able to seduce Judah her father-in-law because he was out looking for a one-night stand. And King David, the “man after God’s own heart” was hardly pure. It was he, not Bathsheba, who initiated their affair. David stole her from Uriah. And, David then had Uriah killed on the battle front. Every single person in the gene-pool of Jesus is a sinner: Asa, Ahaz, Manasseh – proud, arrogant, greedy, dishonest. Yet there they are in the pedigree of the New Adam.

Right from the start of his Gospel Matthew signals that he also makes explicit -- as the rest unfolds. The child is born for sinners. He is born for me!!! He comes through the sinful, to identify with the sinful, to rescue the sinful from their sins. “That is why His name is Jesus” Matthew says in the paragraph following the genealogy: “for He Himself will save His people from their sins.” (1:21).

Right from the beginning we are prepared for the great scandal of the greatest story ever told. Over and over again people who thought they had-it-all-together were horrified by the company Jesus kept. As they say, we are known by the company we keep. They there are prostitutes, washing Jesus’ feet with their tears, and drying His feet with their hair. There they are – tax-collectors; corrupt, opportunists, ripping people off, selling their souls for the almighty buck and they are eating with Jesus!

That is what the genealogy is announcing. The Advent-Christmas season is for sinners! The new creation is for sinners! For me!

He keeps company with me!!

And as we read the rest of the story, we discover that through that scandalous fact sinners are changed. And slowly but surely because like the New Human, through His embrace of us we too are made new.

It is indeed “the most wonderful time of the year.” Because the spot-light shines brightly where it ought to shine all year! On the New Creation. The fulfillment of promise. In who all the walls come down.