

Christmas 1 (HC) (2018)

Just before Christmas I spotted this headline:

“Christmas DNA tests the hottest gifts of the season”.

Okay. There is a lot of interest this year in discovering one’s roots . . . connecting with one’s past . . . working out a family tree.

Family trees, of course, go much further back than this past Christmas.

Indeed, we find a number of these trees in the Bible. Two in the New Testament trace the lineage of Jesus, one in Matthew’s Gospel, the other in Luke’s.

Indeed, you can be glad we are not using the 1549 Prayer Book this morning. If we were, the entire first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel would have been read, including the long list of “begats” at the beginning.

These “begats” are tedious -- no doubt about it -- but necessary. The list with which Matthew’s Gospel begins marks Jesus out as: *Son of Abraham* and *Son of David*.

Neither of these designations can be left behind if we are to understand God’s plan of redemption for the human race . . . God’s plan for you and me.

Son of Abraham links Jesus with the promise made by God to the patriarch in Genesis 22:18: **“In you and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”**

Son of David, meanwhile, connects Jesus to the coming righteous Davidic king spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah:

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth,” (23:5).

Jesus fulfils both prophecies. He comes with blessings for all people and is that King so long expected.

And so, these lists of “begats” are important, but so is the remainder of chapter 1 of Matthew’s Gospel, which you have heard read this morning.

Here in this latter half of the chapter, we find Jesus’ genealogy further expanded. Not only is He marked out as *Son of Abraham* and *Son of David*, but also *Son of God*.

It’s right there in the Angel’s words to Joseph:

“Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.”

Jesus was born without the benefit of a human father. He stands in Joseph’s legal line – yes -- but His father is in fact God. Why is this important?

Why not just leave it with Jesus being the offspring of Abraham and the offspring of David?

Well, first, because this additional fact establishes Jesus’ sin-less-ness, but there’s another reason.

We human beings need something more than another Abraham or David. We need Immanuel -- “God with us.”

Back earlier this year, I went to visit a member of this church who is in a care home in North Carolina. I had been there before, but had forgotten the exact road to take.

As I entered the little town, I noticed a road off to the right that looked correct, but I didn’t have time to turn on the indicator and make the turn.

So, as soon as I could, I pulled off into an area where I could turn around.

But, no sooner than I had, I noticed a state patrol car sitting off to the side, no doubt waiting to pounce on some hapless speeder.

Since he was there, I got out of my car and walked over and asked him where such-and-such care home was.

At this point, he could have given me oral directions. He could have drawn a map. But, did neither. He led me to the facility. He went with me.

I think we can find a parallel here with what God did for us at Christmas. He did not just hand us some directions about how to live the good life or how to be saved from our waywardness. He joined us on our journey.

God with us. Emmanuel. This remains true today. The God who took real human flesh and came among us remains among us in the person of the Holy Spirit, which means:

There is never a place so dark; there is never a night so long that we are alone. God has joined us in our muddle. He is with us.

Somewhere I read that John Wesley died with with these words on his lips: **“The best of all is God with us.”**

Never let go of this thought: You never have to walk alone.

But, we human being require still more. Not only do we required an *Immanuel*, we require a *Saviour*.

The Bible teaches and human experience confirms that we have a problem. That problem is that we have a bent for making wrong decisions, doing wrong things, putting self in the centre. The Bible calls this ‘sin’, missing the mark.

This problem, moreover, has consequences. It has resulted in alienation from God. It is as if a barrier wall has come up between us and our Creator.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah puts it like this: **“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.”**

But, who or what can break this wall down? Who or what can bring about the much-needed reconciliation between ourselves and our Creator.

Today’s Gospel tells us. God Himself has taken the initiative.

Speaking of the child to be born to Mary, the angel tells Joseph: **“He shall save his people from their sins”**.

The God who is *with* us is also *for* us.

He has taken our human nature upon Himself and has come and died for us . . . for our sins. At this point, I don't ask you to understand this transaction fully. Just discover what it means.

It means whatever you have done, whatever mistakes you have made in the past, whatever burdens you may be bearing in the present, whatever scars you are wearing at this very moment, there's hope. A Saviour has been born. Receive Him.

Again, the God who is *with* us is the God who is *for* us.

But there is more still to this genealogy business.

So far, we have seen in Jesus' family tree a line going back to David, a line going back to Abraham and ultimately one going back to God.

But, where do we – yes, you and I -- fit in to Jesus' genealogy?

Well, we get our answer in today's Epistle. Here we hear the Apostle Paul saying:

“Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

What he is saying is that God has pencilled our names into Jesus' family tree.

In Christ, we are adopted sons and daughters. More than that, we are heirs, heirs of God's bounty. All that God has in store for anybody is ours by a sheer act of grace.

Because of Christmas, we are family! God is our Father. Jesus is our big Brother. You and I, close spiritual kin. And, great is our treasure in heaven. Rejoice and give thanks. ///

I don't know about you, but I am beginning to warm up to those lists of “begats” in the Bible. They are more than lists, they are your and my family records.