

Rev. Lisa Schrott  
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Matthew 1:1-17

## From Generation to Generation: There is Room for Every Story

*From Generation to Generation* will be the lens through which we will tell the beloved story of God made flesh throughout the season of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. We are using material from *A Sanctified Art*, a team of artists in ministry who bring scripture and theological themes to life through visual art, poetry, liturgy, graphic design, and more.<sup>1</sup> You will hear their voices in our liturgy and I especially encourage you to be enriched by the visual art they've created. Our Advent devotional features this art and invites you to explore ways to incorporate it into your devotional life. As the creators from *A Sanctified Art* share, "The stories, scriptures, and traditions of the Christmas season have been passed down to us throughout the generations. Many of us enter this season with a swell of memories and emotions as vast as the cultural and religious rituals this holiday holds. Like a tapestry woven throughout time, the Christmas story weaves us in—to remember how God has shown up in the past, to continue the work of collective liberation, to behold the presence of God in flesh and bone. Our Advent theme is also a call to action: what have your ancestors and those who have come before you passed on for you to continue? What about this season will you pass on to the next generation?"<sup>2</sup>

A fitting place to start our journey *From Generation to Generation* is the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. Now those of you who know your scripture well and saw the text for this morning, Matthew 1, might have said to yourself - really - she is going to read all those names. I know the Sunday after Thanksgiving is typically pretty slow, but seriously is she is going to read a bunch of names. That's part we always skip over.

And yes, that is the part we always skip over, but I think there is some things we can learn by looking backward - you see Jesus ancestors help us to understand Jesus as the Messiah who is the fulfillment of God's promise to the Hebrew people and Jesus the Messiah as God's light and word to **ALL** people. As author and historian of American Christianity Diana Butler Bass shares, "Despite the fact that most people find them dull reading, the Bible's genealogies have sparked much debate through the centuries ... Genealogies were not, however, considered dull in their original context. Indeed, genealogy was a common feature of many ancient religions and the sacred texts. The Hebrew people secured political or priestly legitimacy through kinship. The records established lines for passing on possessions and property, along with role, rank, and authority. Religious genealogies are not just economic or political, however. They also register the handing down of religious practices or wisdom, that which is called "tradition."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sanctifiedart.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sanctifiedart.org/from-generation-to-generation-advent-bundle>

<sup>3</sup> <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/december-18-advent-calendar>

To make the reading of the genealogy a little less painful, I'm going to divide the scripture into three parts and look at each grouping of names. So here we go....Mathew chapter 1:1-6

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.

Not so bad....In 2003 Brian and I moved from Minnesota to Louisiana – basically from one end of the Mississippi River to the other. To say that there was a bit of culture shock (and temperature shock) is an understatement. Now, I had grown up in Maryland and lived in a number of other places before descending on Louisiana, but it was my first foray into the deep south and I had a lot of learning to do - new lingo to learn. It took me awhile to finally be able to say y'all without sounding like a politician pandering for votes (although I still say you guys no matter what the gender). A "bless her heart" has periodically escaped my lips and I learned to drop my "g's" with the best of them. I was helped in my transition process by a handy little book given to me by a good friend entitled *A Southern Belle Primer*. While I don't think I'll ever achieve the status of a Southern Belle, I learned much from the book. The book opens with a chapter titled "*Who Are Your People?*"<sup>4</sup>

"When a Southern belle talks about her roots, she is not having a Clairol crisis. In the south, roots means everything: where you come from and who you are. And where you come from is always a subject for deep discussion. If you're kin to the Walkers in Tennessee, you'll be expected to explain whether that is the cotton Walkers or the commerce Walkers. Once that's settled, it's always helpful to let people know if the Walkers are on your mama's side or your daddy's side. Southerners never tire of talking about bloodline. Everyone is questioned. No one is exempt."

Not even Jesus - at least to the writer of the gospel of Matthew. In many ways Matthew has a bit of Faulkner in him - a Southerner who knows that roots mean everything. The first section of the genealogy establishes Jesus' Jewish roots. It begins with familiar names – names that remind us of God's covenant promises of land and family. Abraham who trusted God's plans, when God said: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing."<sup>5</sup> A message of hope.

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<sup>4</sup> Maryln Schwartz. *A Southern Belle Primer: Why Princess Margaret Will Never Be a Kappa Kappa Gamma* Main Street Books, 1991, p2.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12:2-3

And like a good Southern story the genealogy includes a touch of scandal with Tamar and Rahab. And no story would be complete without the beloved Ruth, whose devotion to her mother-in-law and her hard work in the fields gain the attention of Boaz, her redeemer. And then there is David. Ohh, David... bless his heart.

Who were Jesus' people? His roots were through David who longed to build a majestic house for the Lord. And while it was David's son Solomon who eventually built a Temple for the Lord, in Second Samuel, the prophet Nathan tells David "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."<sup>6</sup>

The consensus from scholars is that the gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish community in Syria, the region to the north of Galilee. To this community separated from their homeland, keeping track of the ancestors was important. And as important as the locale was, the consensus is that the Matthew's gospel was written after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. How do you maintain your Jewish identity when you live away from your people and there is no Temple? By reminding them from where they came – from the line of David.

Who were Jesus' people? They were people who knew that in the highest of highs and the lowest of lows that God dwells among them. For the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, it was important to remind his community that Jesus' people were the people of the covenant, of the land, and of David and that as important as the Temple was, Jesus **IS** the fulfillment of Nathan's prophesy to David. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Matthew could have stopped there with David. But he doesn't. He continues in verse 7:

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.

Who were Jesus' people? They were kings. For those who are devotees of the Old Testament books of King and Chronicles, you will recognize these names. They pop up in the prophets as well. These are the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. A bunch of these guys were pretty evil kings, some were a mixed bag, but a few of the kings did what was right

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Samuel 7:16

in the eyes of God, like Hezekiah and Josiah. This section of the genealogy further establishes Jesus' royal lineage, but I think it does more than that. This section ends with the deportation of the Israelites to Babylon. A painful memory for the Jewish people. But an important part of the family history that Matthew couldn't leave out.

For Matthew's community was a people who were separated from their spiritual center of gravity and were trying to find their way in this world and understand just what kind of kingdom Jesus was ushering in. And we get that, because aren't we all people of exile in some way, shape or form. Separated from each other by hurts so deep and wide that we can't imagine a bridge that could cross them, separated by petty paper cuts so shallow and yet so numerous that we live in a state of perpetual annoyance with those whose oxygen we share. And separated from God by our self-importance, independence and busyness.

The exile from Judah to Babylon was a defining moment in the history of the Hebrew people. The great exodus that Moses led was reversed; the freedom from slavery; the rescue from oppression, the journey through the wilderness when they thought they'd never get to the promised land, the conquest of Canaan – Joshua and the walls tumbling down, Samson defeating the Philistines, David defeating Goliath. The land, flowing with milk and honey, the land had been their goal for so long, part of the covenants with Abraham and Moses and David, the land where they built a temple to worship the God who delivered them over and over and over again. Gone. The exile was a defining moment.

How did the Hebrew people respond? How do we respond when the world around us shatters? When we get that phone call in the middle of the night? When we get that diagnosis? When a job ends unexpectedly? We know that God is with us and we light a candle of hope.

Who are Jesus' people? They are a people that know the pain of estrangement. And they are a people who know the hope of reconciliation and the promise and power of rebuilding. For the genealogy ends in verses 12-17:

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.

Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

The Messiah, the Christ. Finally, we get to the end – Joseph and Mary and Jesus. But who are these other folks? Zerubbabel gets some attention in the scriptures after the exile. But the rest of these men? They are summed up in a footnote in my study bible: “the third division contains mostly unknown names.” So who are Jesus’ people? They are the ordinary and unknown; the ones who came back from exile in a strange land and made a life again after all they known had been destroyed. They forged new alliances, and lived and died under Persian, Greek, and Roman rule. They were everyman and everywoman.

The Gospel writer Matthew was writing 40 years or so years after Jesus died to a people who didn’t live in Israel, so it unlikely that the hearers of the gospel would know of the people in this last section. In the days before ancestry.com, reciting the names of the famous, and not so famous, was a way of keeping their faith alive. Because for the Hebrew people, remembering is a sacred act. It is history, and tradition and ritual all rolled together. From generation to generation...

In Deuteronomy 6 Moses says to the people: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.”<sup>7</sup>

And the apostle Paul tells us “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; eat this in remembrance of me.”<sup>8</sup>

In remembrance of this Jesus who is healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the hungry, preaching about the Kingdom of heaven here on earth. “This Jesus, we know his people,” Matthew says. His message may be radical and his ways may rub some the wrong way, but we know his people. We pass on his story from generation to generation. Because no matter who we are, there is room for us here. There is room for our story. Because as the poet Maya Angelou says, “I believe that each of us comes from the Creator trailing wisps of glory.”<sup>9</sup> That means that no matter who we are, there’s room for us here. And that means there is always a candle of hope shining in the dark night, because as the Sanctified Art creators share, “The work of God is always unfolding—in and through us. This Advent, may you remember that you belong—to a story etched into the wrinkles of time, to generations that have come before and will come after, to a love that won’t let you go.”<sup>10</sup> And that my friends, is the good news and the hope we celebrate this first Sunday in Advent. **Join me in prayer....**

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<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-24

<sup>9</sup> From an interview on NPR with Maya Angelou in 2008; <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/89355359>

<sup>10</sup> <https://sanctifiedart.org/from-generation-to-generation-advent-bundle>