

(slide 4) Merry Christmas, everyone! May the Holy spirit be with you all. On a Christmas morning in 414 AD, St. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, declared in his sermon (slide 5) that there could be “*no greater grace than what has now shone upon us from God: the only Son of God has become the Son of Man, making sons and daughters of men, [into] sons and daughters of God*”; something he called the great transformation. At our Christmas Eve service, I read a quote from Laurence Stouckey: (slide 6)...the great exchange that St. Paul declares in 2 Corinthians (slide 7) and which St. Peter describes as participating in the divine nature; and which since then many theologians and poets have tried to describe. The medieval Christians called it the *admirabile commercium*; (slide 8), the wonderful exchange...here is an English translation of an old choral composition (YouTube video).

During Christmas this great adoption process becomes known to all: God is born in time so we can be reborn in eternity, the Son of God becomes the Son of Man, so men and women can become children of the one same Father in heaven. I think our most appropriate response to such news, after waiting thru Advent, is joyful wonder.

I think it's appropriate for our first sermon of the new year to begin in Matthew chapter one with the genealogy of Jesus...if you remember, I had warned you we would be getting back to this. There is a wonderful cathedral in Cambridge, (slide 9) the Ely Cathedral, which dates back to 672 AD, although the present building dates back only to 1083 AD. In the central nave there is a painted wooden ceiling that depicts the lineage of Jesus. It was painted in the Victorian era by two locals (slide 10). In the 7th panel is a depiction of a Jesse tree, or the tree of Jesse from Isaiah. How many of you have heard that expression? These sort of Jesse trees are one of the most common Christian motifs across the world and are the first use of using the idea of a tree as a way to map a genealogy. All of them are based on Matthew and Luke; today we will be looking at the Matthew genealogy. Let's stand for the reading of the Gospel.

Over the years, a lot of people have made a big fuss over the differences between Matthew's genealogy and Luke's. Almost all of the differences can be explained by two things: Matthew follows the line through Joseph while Luke follows it thru Mary...of course this will change some of the names! Also, Matthew and Luke have different audiences; Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience to demonstrate that Jesus has a legal right to the throne of David, so he focuses on those ancestors with connections to the covenant, which is why he goes back to Abraham, while Luke is writing to a gentile audience and trying to demonstrate Jesus' relation to all of humanity...which is why he goes back to Adam. And since genealogies were designed to be memorized, each writer would structure their genealogy in such a way as to make it more memorable. Matthew's genealogy is broken up into three sections of fourteen; the numerical value in Hebrew for David is fourteen; his Jewish audience would have understood this and gotten the point.

The first verse uses the same wording as Genesis 2:4 and 5:1, which is a problem for those who don't believe Genesis is historical; either both Matthew and Genesis are historical or neither is historical. Following this, the opening makes it clear that Jesus is the one the Jewish nation had been waiting for. Matthew begins with Abraham and takes special note of those who were key in the covenants: he wants to make sure that his Jewish audience would understand that Jesus is the Messiah that has come to fulfill everything the prophets pointed to. But he also includes disreputable people, Gentiles and horror of horrors...gentile women! (go through rest of genealogy for some distinctives).

Of course, many dispute the historicity of this genealogy, or even that Matthew Levi, the tax collector (slide 11) wrote the gospel. The earliest Christians knew that it was the disciple of Jesus who compiled the Gospel account and that he did so while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. An interesting side note: in about 50 AD, Caesar Claudius...the one who expelled all the Jews from Rome in (Acts 18:2) because of all the arguing about Jesus...set up a decree, called the Nazareth decree (slide 12) that warned of capital punishment for those violating tombs...see Matthew 28:11-15. Again, I don't believe in the truth of scripture because of archeology, but it is interesting to note that none of it has yet been proven incorrect.

The message is clear: God is faithful to his covenant promises to the point that he will use “even” gentile women to accomplish his purposes. In other words, God will move heaven and earth to make sure he finishes what he promised. Not only that, your own righteousness, or lack thereof, is no obstacle to the salvation God offers (Thank God!). As we walked through the Old Testament, the repeating theme was that it was God who saves and so here in the genealogy, it is once

again made clear: no matter who you are; Jew, Gentile, murderer, man, woman, prostitute, liar, adulterer, fornicator, cheater...or great king; God is faithful and will save. And because this is an historical genealogy; it is rooted in history and fact; this savior is a real, historical person who is the genuine Messiah and therefore has the authority to be King. And because he is the son of God, he has the authority to forgive sins and the power to return and fulfill God's plan of salvation... to restore all creation and reconcile all humanity to himself on his return.

Against the backdrop of a world increasingly hostile to Christianity, Matthew solidifies his church's identity as the true people of God, who transcend ethnic, economic, and religious barriers to find oneness in their adherence to Jesus the Messiah; King and Savior! (slide 10) or as Philippians puts it *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*