

“Family Trees.”

Jesus had a shady family tree. But, then again, who doesn't!

In my family, like most, Thanksgiving and Christmas are times when the whole family comes together for the holiday – and the food! Now that my siblings and I have families of our own, when we gather at the cottage for Thanksgiving there will be about 25 of us; Christmas will be just as crowded. After Christmas there's another family event that I always look forward to: my Aunt's “Family Christmas Party.” This is the one time that the extended family – and their family's families – all come together to ‘catch up.’ Last year, at this party, my Aunt handed out her latest installment in her four-book chronicling of our Grandfather's parents' lives. Writing to tell the family story has been something our family has done for generations.

The author of the Gospel of Matthew wrote his account of Jesus' life and ministry to tell the story of God's family. To do this the author started with Jesus' ‘family tree,’ or genealogy. By doing this the author chose to use the past to reveal how Jesus was the fulfillment of the God's promise made to Abraham – that God would bring about a ‘new beginning’ to save His people.

Fittingly, this ‘family tree’ starts the New Testament, but it is a curious list. Like every family – mine included – there are saints and sinners, rich and poor, petty potentates, wastrels and womanizers; it's made up of the known and unknown players of history. Remarkably, and rare for ancient genealogies, it mentions five women. Truth be told this list begs the question; is this the best God could do? Is this really the long line of faith that somehow carried – and brought – God's plan for our salvation into fruition? Tracing Jesus' lineage makes the saying true: “God writes straight with crooked lines.” But by listing the 42 names of Jesus' genealogy, the author of the Gospel of Matthew reveals the arc of God's story of our salvation through our earthly story – good and bad; it's all there.

The thing I like about reading up on our family history is that it informs who I am and explains how I got here; after all, I have always believed that we are who we are because of those who went before us. The generations of my family – on both sides – were faithful Christians who lived lives of service to God and the Church. I am who I am – and, in many ways, believe and do what I do – because of them.

The writer of this list of names knew that his community could not really understand who Jesus was as the fulfillment of God's promise if they did not understand the sweep of God's plan for the people of Israel. To do this the writer reminds them of the generations that went before them to reveal how God worked through His people – and individuals – to ensure that His promise to Abraham would be fulfilled. And, in doing so, he tells them who they are by connecting the dots of their past to explain that Jesus is the Messiah.

Why all the talk about family trees? This fall at St. Andrew's, for our fall session of the Tuesday Morning Bible Study, we will be looking at the family tree at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew to learn the story of God's promise and how we are also part of that list – and what that means for us in our lives. The Study is entitled “Who's Who? An Advent Primer” because, by learning more about those who helped fulfill God's promise – who prepared the way for Jesus' birth – we will come to know our story better. I hope you'll join us for the Bible Study – and that, together, we can prepare ourselves for the Holidays.