



Introduction.

Well as you may or may not know, we're heading into Christmas with a small series called, "Christmas favourites." And so basically a few of the guys and I are doing a sermon on our favourite Christmas passages. Now at this point, I wouldn't be surprised if there are a few eyebrows raised given our passage read this morning... but yeah – I love this passage. But I can understand if it doesn't ring your jingle bells.

After all, if you compare this to the other gospels, the beginning of Matthew just feels a bit bland. You know, we have *John* who starts off with this magnificent prologue: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And then we have *Mark* who skips the birth of Jesus entirely and just jumps into the baptism of Jesus that quickly sets off the beginning of His ministry. Then you arrive at *Luke* who begins this amazing backstory of character who burst into song after song after song. And now he also has a genealogy but he gives us a bit of a warm up first. And then we arrive at *Matthew*, and the genealogy is just there. There's a whole bunch of begetting, and a whole bunch of names. And so you read through it and there's some names you know, others you can sort of recognise but can't be bothered to look them up, and then there are other names that you have no clue about. But these genealogies are not uncommon in the Bible. And rather than being seen just as a list of names, they're intended to tell a story of origins; a snapshot of the past to better understand the greater scheme of things.

The Movement

The Messages

The Merry Christmas



Outline.

So for this morning, I want to answer three questions. First, what's the movement of the genealogies? Second, what are the messages of the genealogy and the birth of Jesus. And third, what's the merry Christmas? And this third point may confuse you, but basically it is to ask, what about Matthew 1 should have me rejoicing in God and changing the way I live my life as a follower of Christ this Christmas? And so there are three parts we'll go over in our time this morning. The movement, the messages, and the Merry Christmas.

The Movement

The Messages

The Merry Christmas



Now just as a bit of housekeeping before we jump into our text, there are two things I want to point out. First, a genealogy can work a couple of ways. It can be a family tree that slowly branches out to look like a tree, but it can also be a story of origins. And it's this story of origins that is what Matthew is going for. He looks forward from Abraham to Jesus and basically makes a beeline straight to Him. The second thing is that this isn't an exhaustive list of every father between Abraham and Jesus. Rather, it's a selective list because the point is not the genealogy, but Jesus.

The Movement.

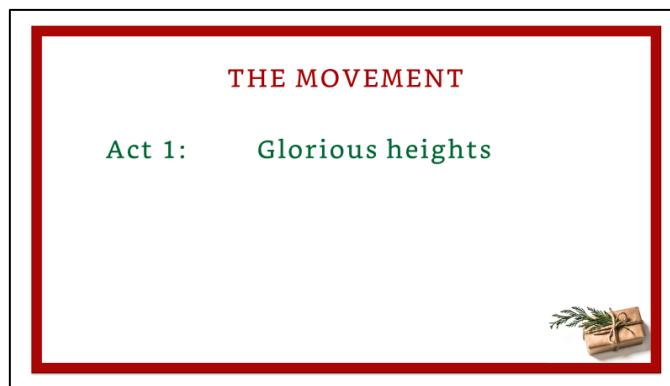
So going to our first point: the way we digest history is by chopping it up into bite-sized pieces. In Western Culture, we can say had Classical Antiquity, then the Middle Ages, and then the Age of Enlightenment. And we have to pay close attention to how one period moves to the next because... it only moves to the next because something significant has happened. You might call these the seams of history: the stuff that stiches it all together. We do this with our own personal lives as well. You may break up your own life on significant events like when you graduated, when you got your first job, when you got married, had a family, and when you retired.

And this is what Matthew does by saying that this is “*An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*” He’s about to tell us a story that has three Acts to tell us the drama behind the history of Israel that give us the origin of Jesus.

In Verses 2-6, we have Act 1 from Abraham to David.

In Verses 7-11 we have Act 2 from David to the exile.

And in Verses 12-16, we have Act 3 from the exile to Jesus.



Act 1. Matthew 1, Verse 2.

The history of the people of God began with a man named Abraham. You see, after a defiant act from the First Man to become like God, humanity was exiled from the presence of God. And then after another defiant act from humanity to reach the heights of God, the world had been split up into different nations, tribes, and languages – and none of them followed God. Each to his own, and his own was not God.

Yet one day, a man named Abraham is called by God to leave his home and his heritage in order to go to an unknown land. And God promises Abraham – or in Bible speak, God makes a covenant with Abraham – to be the father of a great nation, and that all the world would be blessed through him. And it's this promise that God makes with Abraham that sets in motion the history of Israel. Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers – and yada yada yada – Jesse fathered King David.

In King David, we're taken to the heights of Israel's history. Israel had been delivered from Egypt as slaves, God came to dwell **with them** in the wilderness, and He came to lead them into the land He promised to Abraham. And then David comes on the scene – a man after God's own heart – and God makes this man King. This King unified twelve tribes into one nation. He defeated the surrounding enemies to bring peace. He administered justice to bring righteousness. And this King brought the Ark of the Covenant so that God would be **with them**. So that God would dwell with Israel. And it all leads to this momentous moment where God makes a promise – or in a covenant to David. That his throne will last forever. So intimate will the relationship be between God and the King that God likens it as a father is to his son. And the promise is that the ends of the earth will be the possession of His Son.

So what's the drama then of Act 1? The drama of Act 1 is the story of how Israel ascends to its glorious heights. You see the height of the history of Israel that begins with a promise to Abraham to have land, and ends with its fulfilment in the land and a promise to David to spread this land to the ends of the earth. So that all would be his possession, and that the world would be blessed by God. In other words, Act 1 tells us the plan of God to rescue the world. But this is neither where the story of David nor the story of Israel ends, because the life of David, is going to move us into the second Act of Israel's story.

THE MOVEMENT

Act 1: Glorious heights

Act 2: Gory depths



Act 2. Matthew 1, Verse 6.

Reading the second half of verse 6 we read, “*David fathered Solomon by Uriah’s wife.*” What a peculiar way to speak of Bathsheba, is it not? Notice that Matthew doesn’t say ‘David fathered Solomon by Bathsheba’, but that ‘David fathered Solomon by Uriah’s wife’.

You see not long after these glorious heights, one evening David saw a woman bathing on a rooftop. He knew that she was Uriah’s wife; and he knew that he could not have her – and yet he did. He committed adultery with Uriah’s wife. But if that wasn’t bad enough, He then sends Uriah into the frontlines of war so that he would die – and die he did. And so to this end Matthew records, ‘David fathered Solomon by Uriah’s wife’, and this provides the drama of Act 2 in the story of Israel.

You see if Act 1 tells us of the story of Israel ascending to its glorious heights, then Act 2 tells us of the story of Israel descending to its gory depths – and David taking Uriah’s wife to father Solomon is the turning point of this story. And as we watch the history of Israel unfold, what we also watch is the nation of Israel unravel because of the failure of its King to be what a King is supposed to be. One after another, corrupt king fathers a corrupt king who fathers another corrupt king, until the exile.

Now granted, some are better than others, but their sin is just the same. And what is their sin? They’re not rulers who are after God’s own heart; they’re not rulers who trust God with their life, but instead they turn to trust in anything but God: women, wealth, foreign powers, and false gods. All roads that don’t lead to God lead to Babylon – and to Babylon they went, as God finally judged them.

The glory of God that dwelled **with them** in the tabernacle in the wilderness, and the glory of God that dwelled **with them** in the Temple in Jerusalem, departed from the land. God was no longer **with them** in salvation, but He was with them in judgement.

Exile.

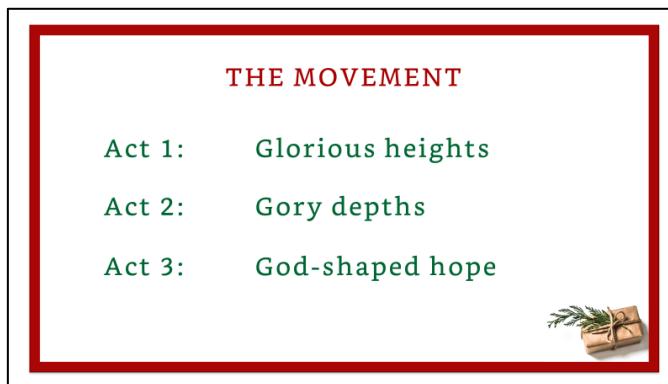
Now while unfortunately Act 1 is not the end of the story, thankfully Act 2 is not the end of the story either. But before we move into Act 3, there's a question to answer: which is why is exile the event that moves us from Act 2 into Act 3 in the story of Israel? In other words, what's so significant about exile? What's so significant about this event that it is a contour in Israel's history?

And this is where it becomes a little bit harder to understand the story of Israel for us in Australia 2000 years on. And yet it is so crucial in order to understand the birth of Jesus. Now of course we can recognise that being exiled from your home country to a foreign country is a tragic event. After all, you lose your home and your heritage, just as Abraham lost it when he went in search for the land.

But the significance of the land of Israel runs much deeper in its identity and its story. You see, if I were to summarise the whole message of Scripture in just three words, they would be these words: **God with us**. It's the question you ask when your relationship with your spouse is falling apart: where are you God? It's the question you ask when your child is spiritually lost: where are you God? It's the question you ask when you have lost your job and are questioning whether you need to move your home to somewhere that seems foreign: where are you God? It's the question you ask in the darkest moments of your life – those times when you're all alone: God, are you with me?

You see brothers and sisters, life in the land was *the same* as life with God. The promise of the land was not to have land, but the promise of the land was to have a place to do life with God. In the joys and the pain, the celebration and the sorrow – it is a place to live the beautiful life with God in a broken world. Festivals were timed with seasons which were timed with God's mighty acts of salvation. Every seven days was a day of rest for man; every seven years was a year of rest for the land; and the year after every seven times seven years was a rest from debt – the year of jubilee. In other words, the entire constitution of Israel was life with God because... God **with us**.

Exile was more than a departure from the land. It was the end of a nation that God promised to Abraham, and it was the end of a kingship that God promised to David. It was the movement from being free to being a slave, from being whole to being broken, and from being at rest to being restless. Everything that Israel became in Act 1 of their story, it unbecame in Act 2 of their story: it was the seismic rupture to life with God. And this... this leads us into Act 3.



Act 3. Beginning in Matthew 1, Verse 12.

We see Act 3 begin *after the exile*, and what is perhaps most striking is how lacklustre this list of names are. You see, up until now, all the names and the lives of those names from Abraham to David, and from David to the exile can be found in Scripture. But here in Act 3, the last name we find recorded in Scripture is Zerubbabel in verse 12.

Be as much of a Biblical nerd as you want to be and you'll still not find out more about the names that follow from verses 12 to 15. You see, there's a reason why you'll not recognise any of those names.

Yes they returned to the land, but more important than returning to the land is the answer to the question, "**Is God with us?**". Yes the temple where God's presence would dwell was rebuilt, but the glory of God was nowhere to be seen. And yes Israel made new promises to God, but the voice of God was nowhere to be heard.

You see, though Israel returned to the land from exile in Babylon, there was the sense that the exile was not over. In other words, they were still in spiritual exile from God. But exile wasn't the end of the story; it was never meant to be the end. In fact God had promised that after the exile was over, He would make a new covenant, or a new promise with them. He would give them a new life with Him; an everlasting life that was only filled

with His favour. This was the hope of all the prophets – that God would at last provide a salvation that was forever.

And so here in Act 3 – in this final movement in the story of Israel – what's the drama?

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

This hymn penned in 1851 that we sung this morning is one of my favourites. It captures the sombre tone and deep longing for the people of God to have **God with us**. So what's the drama of Act 3? It's the God-shaped hope for God to act *one last time*. The hope that exile was not the end of Israel's story, but that they would have life with God. The hope that God would eternally be **with them**.

And Matthew tells this story in the anonymity of the names. You hear the drama in the silence as the people of God wait for God to act *one last time*. And these names in Act 3 remain anonymous until we get to verse 16 where a man named “*Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus who is called the Christ.*” And that's where the genealogy ends and allows Matthew to conclude in Verse 17 that it was fourteen generations from Abraham to David; fourteen generations from David to the exile in Babylon; and fourteen generations from the exile in Babylon to... *the Christ*.

The Movement

The Messages

The Merry Christmas



The Messages.

So what's the message of this genealogy?

What's Matthew trying to tell us? Well now that we have the drama of the movements can we now see the message of his genealogy and birth.

What is the message of Jesus' genealogy?



You see, this genealogy is more than a list of names. What Matthew is telling us by beginning with Abraham and ending with Christ is that the climactic end to the story of Israel *is* Jesus... who is the Christ. That what began in Abraham as a promise would find its fulfilment in Jesus the Christ. That Jesus is the one whom God will announce as His Son, and unlike David and all the kings who have gone before, He is the one with whom God would be well pleased. You see in Jesus being the Christ, He is the King through whom God will eternally end the exile and win salvation for His people; and that Jesus is the King through whom all the nations will be blessed. In other words, Jesus is the God-shaped hope through whom God acts *one last time* to rescue the world.

So to take from the Apostle Paul's way of speaking, the message of this genealogy is that *Jesus is the Christ who is the 'yes' and 'amen' to all the promises of God.*

What is the message of Jesus' genealogy?

Jesus is the Christ
who is the 'yes' and 'amen'
to all the promises of God.



But why was Jesus the goal of Israel's story? Why was He the Christ? Why wasn't it Eliakim or Eleazar or one of those other random names after the exile? And this is where Bing Cosby might say, well "It's beginning to look like Christmas," because now we arrive at the birth of Jesus, and in understanding the message of the birth of Jesus we find our answer as to why He was the Christ who is the goal of Israel's story.

So what is the message of the birth of Jesus?

Looking from verse 18 until the end of the chapter, what we see is that there was a woman named Mary who'd been engaged to Joseph the son of Jacob. But before they were married it was discovered that she was pregnant. Now this was no ordinary conception but a miraculous one by the Holy Spirit, but at this point in time, Joseph didn't know.

So you can image Joseph struggling with what's going on. You see, he was a godly man and being a godly man, he wanted to marry a godly woman. He had his priorities right. But then he learns that his wife to be is pregnant. So you can see the predicament he's in. In his mind, Mary has committed adultery. But because he was godly, he didn't want to make it a public spectacle. After all, the life ahead of her was going to be hard enough – all the shame and gossip that would go about her. And so he sought the Scriptures considering what to do and before he went to bed one night, he'd resolved to divorce her in secret. He was going to wake up, and not claim Mary as his wife or Jesus as his son.

And then in a dream, an angel of God appears to him saying, "Joseph, son of David...". Now at this stage you can imagine Joseph thinking, "Son of David? But my father's name is Jacob... look I can show you in my family tree. It says that I'm the son of Jacob, and my father was the son of Matthan, and he was the son of Eleazar, and he was the son of ... ahhhhh... this is a dream from God about the destiny of Israel."

So the angel says, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife because her pregnancy is from the Holy Spirit. She's going to give birth to a son, and you are to give him a name. And his name will be Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

You see, the pregnancy of Mary by the Holy Spirit was not some random act of God. No prophet in Israel's history prophesied that the Messiah would be born from a virgin. In other words, the prophet imagined a day when the immortal, eternal, invisible God was

not with us in a tabernacle or a temple, but that He was **with us** as a man. The prophet saw a day when the veil between us and God was removed and we not only heard His voice, but we saw His face. The prophet saw that climactic end when God would truly be **with us**. Because only when God was truly with us could He truly save us from our sins.

So Joseph wakes up. And now understanding that his wife to be was in fact a godly woman, and that this pregnancy is of divine origins, Joseph marries her. And he waits to be intimate with her until she gives birth to a son. And Joseph then names him Jesus. And the significance of Joseph naming Him cannot be stressed enough because in doing so, in giving this child a name, Joseph became his legal father. In the act of naming the child, Joseph claimed legal status over Him. And Jesus inherited the legal status of Joseph's genealogy so that He became a son of David through the line of Joseph.

What is the message of Jesus' birth?



So what's the message of the birth of Jesus? What's the message of this monumental event?

Well in one sense it helps us understand why Jesus could be a son of David through the line of Joseph. But there's a bigger point and it answers for us why Jesus was the climax of Israel's story and not Eliakim or Eleazar or anyone else in David's line. And it's at this juncture, that the message of Israel's story connects to yours and mine.

You see since the beginning when God created the First Man in Eden, He created Him to live the beautiful life. The beautiful life is the life that you and I were made for. And what's that life? It's the life that can be summed up in these three words, "**God with us.**" It was God's design to be with us. He created us to know Him, to reflect who He is – or to image Him – and to be with Him always. Let me repeat that again in case you missed those three points: He created us to know Him, He created us to reflect who He is, and He created us to have life with Him always.

And yet in the garden, we see the First Man, Adam, rejecting this life. You see He wanted paradise for all it had to offer. He wanted knowledge and he wanted life, but He did not want to know God and He did not want life with God. And on this day, and ever since this day, humanity has been exiled from having **God with us**.

And this word, *exile*, is what begins to connect our story with the story of Israel. Because you see, ever since that day of exile, God began to write the story of how He will rescue the world, so that once more man can say, **God with us**. And the story of Israel matters because God called Israel to be the people through whom He will rescue the world. In fact, your destiny and my destiny is dependent on the destiny of Israel.

But the unfortunate reality about all of this is that when we trace through this genealogy in Matthew chapter 1, we see Israel doing the same thing as Adam as their story unfolds. Act 1 tells of the ascent to glorious heights; and Act 2 tells of the descent to gory depths. The story seems to repeat itself over and over and over again. It has us realise that if we will have **God with us**, we need God to save us. Yes we need a God-shaped hope, but this God shaped hope is in God Himself. Because quite frankly, if it were not God who saved us, there would be no Act 3.

We need an Act 3, but we can only have an Act 3 if God intervenes. And so in telling us the story of Israel, Matthew gives us the answer to our question: Why was Jesus the goal? Why was Jesus the Christ and not Eliakim or Eleazar or one of the other random names after the exile? Because the son born of the virgin Mary was by the Holy Spirit. This was the climax to the story of **God with us**. It is not only the climax of Israel's story, but the climax of history.

God eternally changed the relationship between God and man in this Son who was both a Son of man and the Son of God. And the name of this Son was Jesus which means, "God is salvation." Or as the angel said to Joseph in verse 21, "*And you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.*"

What is the message of Jesus' birth?

Only Jesus could rescue the world because only He is truly God with us.



You see the message of the birth of Jesus is that only Jesus could rescue the world because only He is God with us. Only God as man could end the exile from God, because only God as man could save us from our sins. And thirty-three years later, we see the how this genealogy and birth shapes the drama of our salvation. Thirty-three years later as He hung on a wooden cross, Jesus cried out,

“My God, my God! Why have you abandoned me!”

You see, on the cross, Jesus suffered the true exile His people deserved as He saved His people from their sins. He took on the punishment they truly deserve.

The Movement

The Messages

The Merry Christmas



The Merry Christmas.

So what then is the Merry Christmas? Why should this passage make your Christmas all the merrier? Well in case you have yet to pick it up, our time this morning has been to understand that the story of Scripture can be summed up in the words, “**God with us.**” You were made to know God, you were made to reflect God, and you were made to do life with God always. This is the beautiful life that God invites us to live. And so what I want to glean from this passage are a few lessons about God because I think this passage helps us know God a little better so that we can reflect God a little more.

THE MERRY CHRISTMAS

The Grace of God



The Grace of God. The first is the grace of God. You know I look at this genealogy of names and it tells me of the grace of God. This is a list of great sinners who did even greater sins.

Just look at the story of Jacob. He deceives his dad to have his brother's inheritance and then he runs away. He then meets a woman named Rachael and wants to marry her, but the dad of Rachael doesn't want him to have her so he deceives Jacob to give him his other daughter Leah. But Jacob's not happy with that so he betrays their dad so he can have both Leah and Rachael. But he makes Leah feel like garbage because he really wanted Rachael. But Rachael feels insecure because she can't give birth. So she then weirdly gives Jacob her slave as a wife to have children on her behalf. *And Jacob's fine with all of this!*

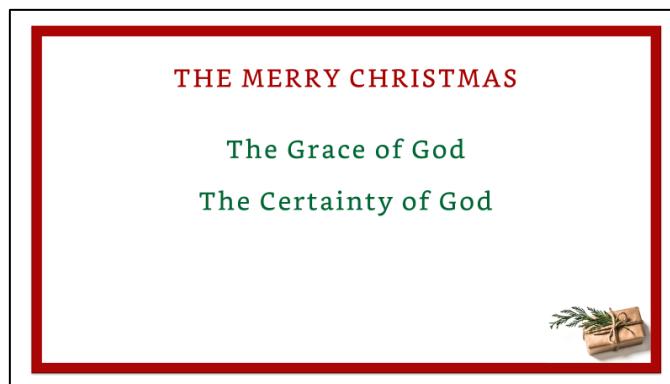
So now Jacob's got three wives and still trying to have children with all of them. But then Leah stops being able to have children and so she weirdly gives Jacob her slave as a wife to have more children. So now he's got four wives, who are all insecure, and my goodness, what about all these children. How bad was their home life? How messed up were his children? Well I'll tell you how messed up. His son Judah persuades his brothers that rather than kill the brother they hated to instead sell him into slavery. And then not too longer after that, Judah sleeps with his daughter-in-law Tamar. But of course you've got to cut him some slack because after all, he didn't know it was his daughter-in-law, Tamar; no, he thought she was a pagan temple prostitute.

And just in case you missed it, have a look with me at Verse 2 and 3 of our passage this morning. It says, "Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and His brothers, Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar." They all made it into the line of Christ! ... How? And you look at the rest of this list and my word is there wickedness. You go to the Kings

listed in Act 2 of this genealogy and one King after another chooses to go after false gods. And this is God's elect people. The First Man He created rejected Him, then the world rejected Him, and then the story of His chosen people Israel is **this**.

But our lives are no different. Our lives are filled with hate, lust, pride, envy, betrayal, and idolatry. We are constantly searching for things to give us life and purpose outside of God; and we are rebels to God regard our ways above God's. And as I have had the privilege to dwell on this passage, I have found myself speechless and awestruck that God did not send us all to hell. And not only did He not send us all to hell, but He became one of us to save us so that we could have life with Him.

I understand God's grace both less and more. Less because I just don't understand why He does this. More because I am learning that He is more gracious than I can comprehend.

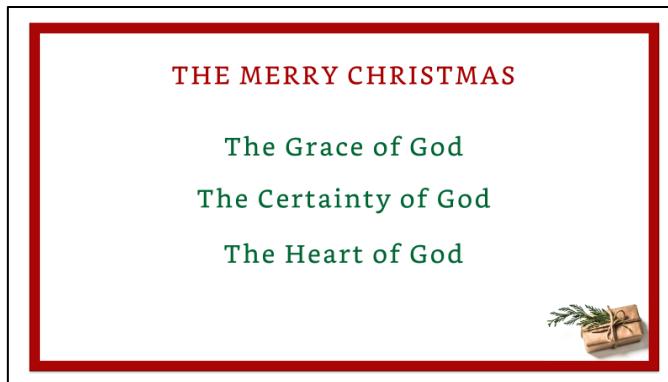


The Certainty of God. The second thing we learn about God is His certainty. God has demonstrated Himself as a promise-keeping God who will carry out His plans. And there is no sin so grave, and no opposition so powerful that it will thwart Him from carrying out His plans. *God designed to be with us and He was faithful to accomplish it, no matter how messy it got.*

Now if you're here this morning and you have put your God-shaped hope in Jesus, but you're here also this morning feeling uncertain about things going on in your life or you're struggling to know the answer of the question, "Is God with you?", can I take you to the end of the Book of Matthew. You see, after Jesus died and rose from the grave, He promised all those who follow Him,

"I am with you always, to the end of the age."

God took on flesh to be with us, He died in the flesh to save us, and He rose from the dead in the flesh to give us life with God. I can't say anything about your situation with any certainty, but I can say with certainty to those who are followers of Jesus that He is with you – whether you believe it or not right now, He is with you.



The Heart of God. And the final thing I think is relevant for our time this morning is the heart of God. Over our time this morning, we focused on the seams of the genealogy. In Act 1, Abraham and David; in Act 2, David and the exile; and in Act 3; the exile and Christ. But Matthew has planted hidden gifts in the genealogy that tell us something about the heart of God. And where you'll see these gifts is in the "by" in Act 1. Judah fathered Perez and Zerah **by** Tamar... Salmon fathered Boaz **by** Rahab... and Boaz fathered Obed **by** Ruth.

Now the first thing you'll notice is that they are woman – and that's significant. But the second thing you'll notice is the identity of these women. Tamar, a Canaanite; Rahab, a Canaanite; and Ruth, a Moabite. In other words, they're all women, and they're all gentiles. And I haven't even mentioned yet that all of them had some infamy because of their promiscuity, or shadows of promiscuity in the case of Ruth.

And so with this simple word "by", Matthew is communicating the profound truth that God has folded into his plan of salvation the sinners and sufferers, and the derelicts and outcasts. *The heart of God is to fold into His story the nobodies.*

So you know what the wonderful thing is? The fact that Jesus had such sinners and sufferers as his forebearers means that we can expect that Jesus would have such sinners and sufferers as His followers. In fact it's the very reason why He was born. So that He could be **with us** and so that He could save us from our sin and our suffering.

And that to me sounds a lot like gospel to a gentile like me. He is drawn towards derelicts and outcasts, and He dines with them, and He heals them.

You see, on the one hand, God's plan unfolded in a way we would never design, but perhaps more profound is that God's plan unfolded with people we would never include. And this God confronts us with His gentle and lowly heart and bids us to follow in His ways. So rather than giving you a permanent life change, let me give you a challenge for this Christmas. Who will you share a table with this Christmas? Who do you know is in desperate need to be folded into the story of God?

Conclusion.

So I'm just going to finish briefly. Why do I love this Christmas passage? Our God is the God of stories who enters history to fold sinners and sufferers, the derelict and downcast, into His own story to be with them. And so the main point of today is this: *God enters history in Jesus to be **with us** so He can fold us into His story.*

God enters history in Jesus to be
with us so He can fold us into His story

