

Luke 2:1-4

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)”

My father's great-grandfather, my great-great-grand father arrived at Ellis Island with his wife and she was with child, they came from Ireland. My great-great grandfather was a blacksmith and he passed this trade down to his son my great-grand-father. My mother's great- grandfather was a Blackfoot Indian he was out of Canada. His name was given to his family by the French missionaries. This was so the French could pronounce their names. His last name was Domini, but when he came of age and left Canada to come into the United States looking for work he change the spelling of his last name by adding "que" to the end of it making his new name Dominique. This was my mother's maiden name.

Tracing where we come from can be fun. Our son and his wife have been tracing both sides of their families. Kevin even has found a photo copy of the travel papers from when my great-great-grandfather arrived at Ellis Island. You can find out some interesting things about families when you look into where everyone came from, and you may even find out some things you wish would stay hidden. You may even find relatives you would rather not claim.

One day there was a big snowstorm. An elementary school teacher felt she should warn her pupils against playing too long in the frigid weather. She said: “Now children, you must be careful about colds and overexposure. I had a precious little brother, only seven years old, who went out into the cold and snow with his new sled and stayed too long. He caught a cold, pneumonia set in, and three days later he died.” For a moment the class sat in awed silence. Then a hand shot up in the back of the room. A youngster asked: “What happened to his sled?”¹

Family will surprise you with some of the things they say and/or do, and sometimes they will drive you out of your mind. Has anyone in the room ever had difficulty with one of your family members? Of course you have. I could ask our young people, have any of you ever had trouble with your parents? Don't hold up your hands. Generation gaps are a part of being a family and often cause problems. Even in the very best of families there is tension.

Jesus was born of the house and lineage of Joseph who was the husband of Mary. When Jesus was born that completed the lineage of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph, 42 generations of which Matthew only mentions

41. There is another name used throughout the Bible for Jesus, it is the Christ. He is often called the Son of Man. Though in a new translation of the Bible that has been changed to say 'the human one,' which as far as I am concerned waters down Scripture so as not to offend anyone or their current way of living. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, to paraphrase C.S. Lewis, 'The Son of God became the Son of Man to enable the sons of men to become the sons of God.'

All of us would like a little royalty in our heritage. Queen Elizabeth reportedly said that she wanted her son Charles to marry a woman with a history not a past. People have asked me, 'are you kin to the famous Dalton Gang,' who were from Coffeyville Kansas, who were known for robbing banks throughout the mid-west? I take a moment and say, "I wish."

In Matthew 1:1-17 we discover we, as Christians, are in the lineage of Jesus. When we read these names we often just slide over them like water over a rock. The gospel of Matthew was written for the Jews. Any 1st century Jew reading this genealogy would have stopped dead in his tracks reading a woman's name.

Women didn't make genealogies in the Old Testament. Remember when Jesus fed the multitude, there were 5,000 men not counting women and children. Women and children didn't count.

In Matthew's lineage he did not name the good women: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael – instead he lists Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. Tamar posed as a prostitute in order to get pregnant by her father-in-law, Judah. Rahab was a prostitute who sheltered the spies sent by Joshua to scout out Jericho. Ruth was a Moabite who was treated worse than lepers by Jews. Bathsheba gave in to David's lust and participated in the cover-up plot to kill her husband. This is not a nice list that is included in the genealogy of Jesus.

An American family hired a genealogist to research their family tree. Like most families, a skeleton appeared in the closet. A great uncle by the name of Zach had been convicted of murder, held on death row, and executed in an electric chair. The family asked the researcher if he could tweak the story of Uncle Zach a bit to make it less embarrassing. Here is what he wrote: "Uncle Zach worked for the Department of Justice for a number of years, after which he was given a chair in applied electronics at a well-known

government institution. He became quite attached to it, held there by very strong ties until eventually he died. His death came as quite a shock."

There is no cleaning up required in the ancestry of Jesus. He came to earth for Gentiles as well as Jews, for sinners as surely as saints, for the down and out as well as the up and out. That is why we call him Savior. Whatever your heritage you can come to Him just as you are. You need not wait to give up the jug, nor clean up your act, nor erase your history. Christ the Savior is born. He wants to be your Savior today.

Romans 8:16-17 says "*it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,*" which means we are all related. We all belong to the same family. Being part of a Family Matters; part of being a family is that sense of belonging, and we all want to belong don't we? We all want to be known by others and to know that someone out there knows who we are and cares about us. We all have a need to belong, to be in community together.

That's why we join clubs, fraternities, sororities, civic organizations, sports teams, and even Churches. We have a need to be in community with others just like us or close to being like us. That's part of how we are wired. We want to feel part of something, we want to belong.

I know many of you have read the various Chicken Soup for the Soul books. In *A 4th Course of Chicken Soup for the Soul*, you may remember a story entitled simply: "Chuck" by Pete Parker.

Ms. Parker tells of grocery shopping, something she hates to do, and tells of getting in "the wrong line." It was taking forever and everyone was muttering and complaining. Then she discovered the reason for the delay. Chuck, the grocery bagger. Chuck talked to each and every item as he gently put it in the sack. "Oh, Mr. Cake Mix, you are going to become a Christmas dessert for someone special. Hello, Mr. Cereal, you are going to make the boys and girls grow up nice and healthy," and other things like that. After all the items were bagged he would look at the customer and say, "I know your family loves you because you take such good care of them." Ms. Parker says she just shut up and waited her turn.

Chuck helped take her bags to the car and she tipped him \$2. He looked at the two dollar bills; he looked at her. Then his face lit up, and he jumped in the air and yelled at the top of his lungs, “Look at me, look at me! Someone thinks I’m worth two whole dollars.” And he danced his way back to the store. The next time she went to the store, one of the employees who had witnessed the events of that day said, “Thank you for giving Chuck a tip. We know he has value, but it is far more important for Chuck to know he has value.”ⁱⁱ

Both Chuck and Ms. Parker learned a valuable lesson about self worth that day. It’s important that we know we have value. It’s important that we know we belong. As Christians we need not worry over who we are related to, what is important is that we are related, and we belong. As Christians you and I have been incorporated and adopted into the *Family of God*, and as such this means we belong to the *Family of God*. We are part of the Family of God and thus have value in God's eyes. This makes our tree, our family tree the largest tree ever. This Christmas may the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of Tamar, the Son of Rahab, the Son of Ruth, the Son of Bathsheba, the Son of Joseph, indeed, the Son of us all – welcome you with

open arms? And as He welcomes you may you in turn welcome all of your adopted brothers and sisters. After all, as Christians we are all part of the same tree, good, bad, and indifferent. How big ... **IS** ... your tree?

ⁱ Rev. Gregory Turner, http://www.acparis.org/sermons/2003_09_21_Turner.htm.

ⁱⁱ Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Hanoch McCarty, Melody McCarty, *The 4th Course of Chicken Soup for the Soul* (Deerfield Beach: Health Communications, Inc., 1997) pp. 241-242