**The Ancestry of Jesus**

Text: Matthew 1:1-17

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**Scriptures:** Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 1:1-17

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 72, 231, 533, 233, 117

**Series:** Advent (#1)

**Theme:** The origin of Jesus, the Christ/Messiah as a descendant of David and Abraham

**Proposition:** To bear witness to Jesus, we need to introduce him to others

**Introduction**

Do you know your own ancestry going back many generations? Your ancestry is your family background and/or ethnic descent. Through the website ancestry.com you can organise to have a sample of your DNA tested and then potentially uncover your family tree, seeing which part of the world your ancestors lived and even discovering cousins you didn’t know that you had. Today, with ready access to genetic testing and family history database technology many people are increasingly interested in finding out about their origins. Knowing where we have come from can help us to understand more about who we are and who we are connected to ‘by blood’.

Origins are important – as the first few chapters of the Bible in the book of Genesis testify. The name “Genesis’ literally means ‘the origin of something’. After the first chapter, the book of Genesis is divided into 10 parts with each section beginning with the ‘generations of’ or in Hebrew ‘toledoth’ formula: ‘*these are the generations of’* (2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). The first Jewish readers of Matthew’s gospel likely knew the Old Testament Scriptures better than most of us here. They would not have been surprised that he begins his gospel with words that parallel the ‘toledoth’ formula in the book of Genesis. “*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matt 1:1).

The Greek word translated ‘genealogy’ means ‘origin’. We may at times be tempted, when we see one of the genealogies in the Bible, to say or think ‘*O no, all those difficult Old Testament names to pronounce!*’. I wonder how many of us have read all the lists of names in 1 Chronicles chapters 1-9? Often, we just skip over these long lists of people from times past. However for the first readers they would have seen things very differently. For them knowing the family background of people in God’s Word was important.

The fact that the genealogies are part of Scripture means that they are important for us all. The ancestry of Jesus Christ is the most important genealogy in the Bible because He is the most important human in history. Matthew describes the genealogy with which he begins his gospel as being that of *Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.* Our three points this afternoon focus on the three parts of this description:

1. The origin of the Christ
2. The origin of the Son of David
3. The origin of the Son of Abraham
4. **The origin of the Christ**

To our western ears ‘Christ’ sounds like a surname for Jesus. As you probably already know ‘Christ’, ‘Christos’ in Greek, ‘Messiah’ in Hebrew, means ‘anointed one’. Three types of role, of office, of special task, for which specific people were anointed are revealed in the Old Testament: prophet (1 Kings 19:16); priest (Ex 29:7); king (1 Sam 16:13). All three were commissioned for special service to God in their work:

* **Prophets** declared the Word of the Lord, only speaking the truth, mostly recounting what God had already done and said, but also prophesying about future events.
* **Priests** were in charge of sacrifice and offerings at worship places.
* **Kings** ruled and reigned over their citizens within territorial boundaries.

The Old Testament predicts a coming servant of the Lord who will be anointed, not with oil, but with the Spirit of God (Isaiah 42:1). He would be the promised: prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18,19); priest like Melchizedek (Ps 104:4); and king like David (Zech 12:8). Matthew’s gospel is about this promised, long-awaited, Anointed One. Notice the emphasis in the repetition: v1 ‘*The genealogy of Jesus* ***Christ***’, then v16: **“***Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called* ***Christ***”.

Matthew notes that there are: 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 generations from David to Israel’s exile in Babylon, 14 generations from the exile to the coming of the Christ. If you read through the history of the kings of Israel in the books of Kings and Chronicles, you will notice that not all the kings of Judah are listed. Some names are missing e.g. Athaliah and Amon. There are also only 41 names in the genealogy, not 42 (3 groups of 14). In selecting 14 generations from David to the exile in Babylon, together with 14 from Abraham before this period and 14 afterwards to Joseph, Matthew is showing the divine purpose and order of history through a literary structure that is not intended to be a precise biological lineage. The message here in his gospel is that ‘*the birth of Jesus Christ was no accidental event*’. It was the result of God’s sovereign plan being worked out through many generations over long periods of time.

Matthew reveals that the name of the Christ is ‘Jesus’. The Hebrew-speaking Jews, for whom this gospel was first written, knew that Joshua – Jeshua – means ‘Yahweh saves’. In Greek this name is ‘Jesus’. The origin of this name Jesus is made very clear by Matthew in v21 when he records the angel’s words to Joseph about the child Mary is carrying: “*She will give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*”. The special task for which Jesus was anointed was to be the Saviour of God’s people from their sins.

Drawing on Scripture, Heidelberg Catechism LD12A31 explains the three offices to which Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and how these relate to His unique role as Saviour to be:

* our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance;
* our only high priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father;
* our eternal king who governs us by His Word and Spirit and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom He has won for us.

Especially at Christmas time, we tend to remember the miraculous way in which God, in the person of His Son, became a human being with the highly significant and meaningful name Jesus Christ. Humanly, He is a descendant of David, which brings us to our second point.

1. **The origin of the Son of David**

To describe different generations we use terms like son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, great grandson, great granddaughter and then we just keep adding the word ‘great’ in front as we go further and back. In the much more limited vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew, the word ‘son’ refers to a male descendant of any previous generation. This is reflected in Matthew’s use of the Greek word for ‘son’. When Matthew writes ‘the son of David’, he is saying that Jesus Christ is a descendant of David, he goes on to explain in verse 5b: “*Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king*”.

What Matthew then does is show the link between King David and Joseph, the husband of Mary. Joseph, Mary’s fiancé when she conceived, was a descendant of David. That’s why, when Caesar Augustus called for a global census, requiring everyone to register, Mary and Joseph travelled from their home town of Nazareth to ‘the city of David’ called Bethlehem. Bethlehem was connected to King David because that’s where his grandfather Obed, Jesse’s Dad, was born to Boaz and Ruth. Bethlehem was the hometown of Jesse and his sons. Remember that Samuel came to Bethlehem to anoint David (1 Sam 16:4).

When we sing ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’ at Christmas time, we identify Jesus as being ‘the son David’. When we sing ‘Once in royal David’s city’, we remember that Jesus was born in the city of His significant ancestor; King David. We remember that He is ‘the son of David’. Being born in Bethlehem meant that in God’s great plan, the Old Testament prophesy in Micah was fulfilled: “*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days*” (Micah 5:2).

But more than this, Jesus being the son of David meant that he was of the ‘*house and lineage of David*’ as Luke puts it (2:4). Jesus is part of the royal family of Israel in which kingship passed down by genetic descent. You can see this in the genealogy with the names of kings after David: Firstly Solomon, then as the 10 northern tribes split away, in the southern kingdom: Rehoboam, Abijah, Asaph, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amos, Josiah, and Jechoniah.

Matthew’s reference to the ‘deportation to Babylon’ helps us to see the significance of Jesus as ‘the son of David’. How? Because the exile in Babylon **ended** the line of kings on the throne of Israel. The covenant promise of God to David appeared to have been unfulfilled. Had God forgotten? Was He not true to his word? He had made a covenant with David through promises made via Nathan as recorded in 2 Sam 7 and related in Psalm 89:35-37 “*Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies*.” The great significance of Jesus being the ‘son of David’ is that he is the promised King of Israel who will reign forever.

When Jesus hung on the cross at Calvary, the charge for which he had been executed was written on a placard above his head: “*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews*” (Matt 27:37). Pontius Pilate was mocking the religious leaders, but what he intended as a sick joke, declared Jesus to be who he is. As prophesied by Isaiah: **“***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isaiah 9:6-7).* Jesus, the son of David is The Wonderful Counsellor with supernatural wisdom, the Mighty God, The divine warrior, the Everlasting Father whose loving rule is permanent. He is the Prince of Peace – bringing perfect, enduring tranquillity, stability, wholeness and harmony.

How could you introduce Jesus as the King whose rule and reign will continue forever to others? Perhaps you could ask ‘How are you going running your own life?’ Who is ultimately in charge of you? Who is your king? Is the kingdom of which you are a part going to last? Jesus is the promised Davidic King, a descendant of Abraham, which brings us to our third point:

1. **The origin of the Son of Abraham**

Why does Matthew add “the son of Abraham” to his introduction? Isn’t it obvious that if Jesus is a descendant of King David, a Jew, then he must also be a descendant of David’s ancestor Abraham? It might seem like ‘doubling up’, but it is not. What do we know about Abraham from the book of Genesis? He knew God and willingly obeyed the call to leave his homeland and follow the Lord’s directions. God made promises to bless Abraham and his offspring and through him to bless ‘*all the families of the earth*’ (Gen 12:3). Abraham was not perfect, but ‘he believed the Lord’ who counted his faith in God’s promises, ultimately fulfilled in Christ, as ‘righteousness’. Abraham was declared right with God by faith. He was justified.

God made a binding agreement with Abraham saying: “*I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you*” (Gen 17:7). He had confirmed this covenant by symbolically passing between the dead bodies of a heifer, a goat, a ram which had been cut in half. The Lord invoked a curse upon himself effectively saying ”*if I do not keep my covenant agreement then I will suffer the same fate as these animals*”.

Throughout the history of Israel, as tracked with Matthew’s genealogy, two facts are clear:

* The people did not keep the covenant with the Lord – they repeatedly disobeyed him.
* The Lord was always faithful.

Matthew writes this gospel during the period of Roman occupation of the land of Israel, most likely before the destruction of the temple in AD70 which is prophesied in chapter 24. The promises made to Abraham had not yet been fulfilled. The land in which the Hebrews lived was not a place ‘flowing with milk and honey’, but a territory ruled by foreign governors and controlled by an occupying army.

Why then the reference to Abraham? To link Jesus to the covenant promise that God would enter into a special relationship with a chosen people. This group of people the Lord calls his own possession. He calls them his son (Hos 11:1). Matthew introduces Jesus as being the One with whom God has this relationship, in chapter 3 describing his baptism where a voice from heaven says: “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (v17). Jesus is the faithful, obedient, truly righteous ‘son’/descendant of Abraham. For Christ, his righteousness is not by faith, but by his own obedience. Jesus is the perfect man, the only one who willingly and fully obeys God. He is the only covenant-keeper.

When God symbolically passed between the cut animals, being represented by a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, Abraham did not walk with him. God prophetically promised to fulfil both sides of the covenant. Jesus is the ‘son of Abraham’ who fulfilled the agreement and also suffered the curse of death for all those who like Abraham who, though covenant-breakers, ‘believed the Lord’. We heard earlier from Isaiah 42 God’s promise of His coming Spirit-anointed servant who was called in righteousness to be a covenant for the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon” (v6-7).

The ancestry of Jesus is utterly unique, like that of no other human being. He is *Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.* The divinely anointed chief prophet and teacher, high priest and eternal king sent by God to save His people from their sins. His kingdom will never end. He has completely fulfilled the covenant that Abraham and his other descendants (both genetic and spiritual) have failed to keep. He was born on this earth to die for others like you and me. Praise the Lord that He has come and that He is coming again.

AMEN.