

Jesus' Grandmothers

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

First Sunday of Advent - November 27, 2022

Texts: Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 1:1-17

SCRIPTURE READING Isaiah 2:1-5

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
it shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Matthew 1:1-17 (from The Message version)

One of the most overlooked texts in the New Testament actually begins the story. Matthew's genealogy lays the foundation for all the rest by affirming Jesus' birthright as a descendant of Abraham and of King David. As Louis can tell you, genealogy is more than names and dates; it's about the stories; and digging into family history often unearths some surprises. To keep you on your toes, count on your fingers or mark the names you recognize, whose stories you're familiar with.

This is the family tree of Jesus Christ, David's son, Abraham's son.

Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob,

Jacob had Judah and his brothers,

Judah had Perez and Zerah (their mother was **Tamar**)

Perez had Hezron, Hezron had Aram, Aram had Amminadab,

Amminadab had Nahshon, Nahshon had Salmon,

Salmon had Boaz (his mother was **Rahab**),

Boaz had Obed (**Ruth** was the mother),

Obed had Jesse, Jesse had David, and David became king.

David had Solomon (**Uriah's wife Bathsheba** was the mother),

Solomon had Rehoboam, Rehoboam had Abijah,

Abijah had Asa, Asa had Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat had Joram,

Joram had Uzziah, Uzziah had Jothan, Jotham had Ahaz,

Ahaz had Hezekiah, Hezekiah had Manasseh, Manasseh had Amon,

Amon had Josiah, Josiah had Jehoichin and his brothers,

And then the people were taken into the Babylonian exile.

When the Babylonian exile ended, Jeconiah had Shealtiel,
Shealtiel had Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel had Abiud,
Abiud had Eliakim, Eliakim had Azor, Azor had Zadok,
Zadok had Achim, Achim had Eliud, Eliud had Eleazar,
Eleazar had Matthan, Matthan had Jacob, Jacob had Joseph, Mary's husband,
The **Mary** who gave birth to Jesus, the Jesus who was called Christ.

There were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, another fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and yet another fourteen from the Babylonian exile to Christ. Word of God, Word of Life.

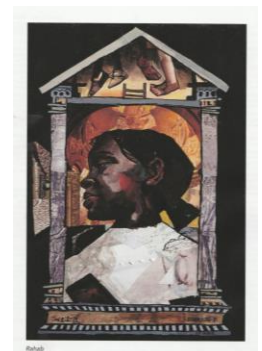
How many names did you recognize? There were five women mentioned. How many of their stories could you tell? There's room for every story, and a reason for every story, too. Let me tell you the stories of the women, Jesus' grandmothers.

Tamar It's not an easy time to be a woman. You've married into an important family, but as a woman you have no value for them until you produce an heir. Your husband, oldest son of Judah, dies before that happens. By Israelite law, his brother is supposed to marry you and give you a son to preserve the line. He uses you, but refuses to impregnate you. Then he dies. By rights, the youngest son should marry you next. But Judah denies you. You return to your family of origin in disgrace, but you hatch a plan.



Disguising yourself as a prostitute, you wait till Judah is away from home, traveling, and waylay him - literally. But - oops! - he's got nothing to pay you with! You take as collateral certain personal effects that identify him. When you turn up pregnant, he's irate - until you present him with his own things. Then he admits he was in the wrong. "She is more righteous than I," he says. You give birth to twins, preserving the line.

Rahab You are a sex worker in the city of Jericho. They don't worship the Hebrew deity there, but you've heard rumors of that God's power. When a couple of Hebrew spies sneak into the city on a military reconnaissance mission, you know which will be the winning side. You hide them on your roof and misdirect the local soldiers who come in hot pursuit. "Tit for tat," you tell the spies. "When you come back under your God's banner to destroy the city, will you protect me and my family?" They agree.



You live with your family right inside the immense walls protecting the city from invasion. With the rest of the people of Jericho, you watch in suspense as the crazy Israelites march around and around, pointlessly, as it seems. Then, when the trumpets sound and the walls famously come a-tumblin' down, only you and your family survive. You marry the Hebrew man named Salmon and you have a baby, Boaz, preserving the line.

Ruth You are a woman of Moab, a traditional foe of Israel just east across the Jordan. But a family of hunger refugees arrives in your town, fleeing famine in their native Bethlehem. You marry one of the sons, your friend Orpah marries another. The father of the family dies, then both husbands die, without children. Orpah goes back to her family, but you've grown fond of your mother-in-law Naomi - kind of a cranky old bird, but she's been good to you. You go home to Bethlehem with her, and try to make a living for both of you by gleaning the leftovers in the fields. You notice the richest guy in town being especially nice to you, making sure you get extra grain, and access to water. His name, by the way, is Boaz. Familiar?



Naomi plots with you. Boaz, she says, is actually a distant cousin. By the law of Israel, as you remember, one of your husband's male relations is supposed to marry you and father children. "Wait until the harvest festival," Naomi coaches you. "Then, when he's full of beer and lies down to sleep, lie down next to him. And let nature take its course." Ruth follows orders. Boaz responds as planned. After tying up some legal loose ends, you and Boaz marry. Sure enough, along comes a son, Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. The line is preserved again.

Bathsheba You're an honorable married woman, married to a general from another country serving in King David's army. While your husband Uriah is off fighting for Israel, David is taking a break from war. He spies you bathing on your roof, and, well, what can you do when a messenger comes requiring you to pay a visit to the king. Is your virtue assaulted ala Hollywood mogul, or are you a willing participant? Or was this maybe your plan all along? We don't know and you will never tell. The upshot is, you're going to have a baby. Uriah, all unaware, refuses to sleep with you and cover up David's mistake. The king has him killed, then takes you for his wife - number 3, or 4, or who knows how many?



Sadly, that baby dies, but you aren't done with David. Exerting all your considerable influence, you persuade him to name your next son as his heir, king after him. He agrees. Solomon becomes king of Israel. The line is preserved.

Mary Who can tell Mary's story? Who doesn't know it? How is she like the other women in Jesus' genealogy? How is she different? [Answers: she is young, she is inexperienced, she is perplexed by the situation, not controlling it. But there is also a hint of sexual boundary breaking when she turns up pregnant, not by Joseph her fiance.



How would you describe the women in Matthew chapter 1, Jesus' grandmothers, or great-great-great grandmothers, through 42 generations? Name some adjectives. What about persistent, creative, intelligent, strategic, daring, courageous, oppressed

by patriarchy but triumphing through their own wisdom and ingenuity? Foreigners who brought diversity to Israel?

Why do you think they're included here, in this foundational story, the beginning building block of the entire New Testament? Is there a place for their stories? How do they figure in God's plan? What do we learn about God from them? Could we say that God uses unlikely agents to bring about the plan of salvation? That God wishes us to follow the example of welcoming and including foreigners and those whom we might shun?

In the end, as you know, Joseph does marry Mary. He adopts Jesus as his son, tying him into the family lineage. That alone reminds us that when God adopts us into the divine family, we are God's children indeed. From generation to generation, there is room for every story. There is room for *your* story. This Advent, think of how God has brought you to where you are today. Not every story is shining and seamless, yet God works through even tragedy and sorrow and bitter choices. That alone gives us hope for the future. Thanks be to God. Amen.



Prayers

God of Abraham and Isaac, God of Tamar and Ruth, God of Mary and Joseph, we pray hoping to get a glimpse of you moving in our own lives, our own stories. We know that just as you walked with every generation before us, so you still walk with us. Thank you for seeing our uncertainty and saying, "You belong here!"

Show us how to make room for stories that are different from our own; show us how diversity enriches us. We pray for refugees who have fled their homes due to hunger, war, natural disaster, rising sea levels, poverty. Show us how we may welcome them and appreciate their gifts.

Glad as we are to see one another's faces, we know that viruses still abound. Help us to recognize the vulnerable among us, and to honor our own vulnerability. Be with those who still work themselves toward burnout caring for others.

When the truth is hard to discern amidst the lies that fly unhindered through the media, let us be guided by your Spirit of love and compassion and inclusion for all. Make us menders of bridges and healers offering hope to those we love. We pray especially for all those who mourn devastating losses in this holiday season, especially in Virginia and Colorado. You come to bring us home; come quickly, Lord Jesus. We pray in your name: Our Father and Mother in heaven...

Indebtedness: *What My Grandmothers Taught Me: Learning from the Women in Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus*, PW Bible Study, 2021-22. Artwork by Cody F. Miller, from the same study.