

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, December 8, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Have you seen the movie titled "Roots"? This film is based on the novel *The Saga of an American Family*, written by Alex Haley, an African American author...

Like many of you, my wife and I are deeply interested in our family history and origins. As first-generation Canadian immigrants, we feel it is important for our children to understand and cherish their Korean heritage, while also encouraging them to maintain their unique identity as Canadians. During our recent visits to South Korea, we took the opportunity to ask my mother and her sister about our family's roots.

According to them, our ancestors were known for being noble and gentle people. Many were hardworking farmers in an agricultural society, valuing diligence and perseverance. My mother grew up in a large family with six sisters and two brothers. Her parents had hoped that she would be their last daughter, so they named her Mal-Ja, meaning "the last girl." However, they ended up having two more daughters after her, and the youngest daughter was also named Mal-Ja.

Despite the limited opportunities in her rural hometown, my mother displayed great determination as a young woman. She moved away to attend a school that offered a high school diploma. With that education, she pursued a career in design and eventually became an instructor, training ambitious students. Today, one of her grandchildren has followed in her footsteps, studying design at a university.

After marrying my father, she fully dedicated herself to raising their three sons. I am the eldest of those children. When I was ten years old, my father fell ill with a disease that required many years of struggle and recovery. Due to his long illness, my mother worked tirelessly to support our family on her own. Even after retiring from her self-employed restaurant business, she continued to work until the age of 75.

Now, despite being diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment four or five years ago, she lives independently. I admire her unwavering faith and determination to live on her own, even while facing this incurable condition. Through her straightforward stories and loving examples during our time in Korea, my wife and I have been blessed to learn about, and experience, the strength of my family's roots - especially my mother's. We want to embody these admirable traits and pass them on to our children and future generations as a legacy of faith, resilience, and hard work.

Christmas is just around the corner. For some of us, this means traveling to visit family or eagerly anticipating reunions with loved ones. This season also gives us the opportunity to reflect on our roots, remember our ancestors, and rejoice in the legacies they have left behind.

As we approach this Christmas season, I pray that God will bless each of us with moments to reflect on our own family histories. May we honor the sacrifices and strength of our ancestors, and carry forward their lasting legacy for the benefits of our children and future generations.

Today, we begin an Advent series titled *Matthew's Christmas Stories*, focusing on the first chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. Some theologians refer to the first part of chapter one as "the forgotten

Christmas story.” Many of us tend to skip over this section, wondering why Matthew includes such a long list of names in the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, before introducing Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. At first glance, it may seem uninteresting, but we must recognize that this passage is one of the most important parts of the Bible.

The New Testament contains four gospels. As some of you may know, the Gospel of Matthew was “written by a Jewish author for a Jewish audience.” In those times, family roots and genealogies were of great importance. For example, a woman preparing to marry a priest was required to provide an unbroken record of her family tree, tracing back at least five generations. Even today, genealogy remains significant in many countries. In some countries, having a pure lineage is often a requirement for joining a royal family.

On this second Sunday of Advent, I invite you to take a closer look at the family tree of Jesus. Together, let’s explore this divine genealogy, uncover the important lessons it holds, and reflect on how we can apply these truths to our own faith journeys.

Firstly, the genealogy of Jesus reveals God’s steadfast faithfulness to all His people. This sacred attribute reaches across all generations, regardless of how individuals respond to God’s call in their faith journeys. When we examine the final statement in the genealogy of Jesus, we see three cycles of fourteen generations: the first set from Abraham to David, the second from David to the exile in Babylon, and the third from the exile to the time of Christ (Matthew 1:17). Within each phase, we find both remarkable stories of success as well as sorrowful and challenging accounts of the characters’ walks with God.

Take Abraham, for example. Known as the spiritual ancestor of faith, he lied to a king about his wife, Sarah, when they were in a foreign land. Unfortunately, this weakness was repeated by his son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, and they did the same thing. Another example is David, a man after God’s own heart. Yet, he committed serious sins against God and set negative example that his son, Solomon, followed to some extent. Jesus’ family tree is marked by the highs and lows of these individuals’ journeys with God. Yet, despite the unfaithfulness of His people, God remained faithful to His promise through three periods of fourteen generations.

If we calculate one generation as approximately 30 years, we see that God remained faithful for over 1,260 years. Regardless of what His people did, one thing that never changed was God’s truthfulness. He fulfilled His promises without fail and worked according to His covenants. The greatest of these promises was the coming of the Messiah. At the appointed time, over 2,000 years ago, God sent His One and only Son, Jesus Christ, as the Savior of the world. Despite the shortcomings, failures, struggles of His people, God fulfilled this covenant.

As I prepared this message, I was reminded once again of God’s faithfulness in my own life. Reflecting on my spiritual journey, I, like the people in Jesus’ genealogy, have often fallen short and disappointed God. There have been times when I felt I was not firmly holding onto His righteous hand, and even moments when I thought I had let it go entirely. Yet, God has never let go of my weakened hands. He has continually reminded me of the identity I have through the grace of Jesus Christ. I am a precious child of God.

Instead of condemning me for my failures, He has understood my struggles, accepted me as I am, and strengthened me to continue running my spiritual race. Today, I can confidently declare, “Oh, my Faithful Lord, my Faithful God, I remember Your promise that you will never leave me nor

forsake me. You have never disappointed me. I trust that You will keep me forever, just as You have kept me in the past.”

Indeed, if anyone is qualified to show this faithfulness, it is Jesus Christ. I am certain that many of you here can also relate to this testimony of God’s enduring faithfulness.

Secondly, the genealogy of Jesus Christ reveals God’s elective purpose. This principle is highlighted in the second verse of the Gospel of Matthew, which says, “Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren” (Matthew 1:2). Let us take a moment to reflect on God’s providence in this verse. Who was Isaac’s firstborn? Isaac had two sons: Esau and Jacob. Although Esau was the firstborn, God chose Jacob according to His sovereign plan. Jacob’s first son was Reuben, but the royal line continued through his third son, Judah. Similarly, David was the youngest of eight brothers, yet he was chosen for this godly genealogy.

Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last...” (John 15:16). In other words, Jesus’ family tree does not follow the order of human birth or tradition; it is determined by God’s sovereign purpose.

In addition to this sacred principle, there is another interesting aspect of Jesus’ family tree. In the second group of names, there are fourteen kings. When I researched these kings, I discovered that not all of them were good kings, fathers, or sons. Sometimes, good kings begat good kings, but at other times, good kings produced evil kings. There were also instances where a good father had a bad son, or a bad father had a good son.

According to the Bible, generational blessings and curses can be passed down from generation to generation (Exodus 20:4-6). This helps us understand why some dysfunctional family behaviors may continue through generations. Even after many years, the shortcomings of the previous generations can still impact their descendants. At the same time, the Bible emphasizes the responsibility we have for our own lives. The decisions we make can affect not only ourselves but also our children, grandchildren, and future generations. That is why we must be accountable for our actions and seek reconciliation with God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

This connection between generational influences and God’s sovereign will teaches us an important lesson: receiving God’s blessing is not based on biological status but on God’s divine election. Sometimes, we might think that because our ancestors were Christians, we can automatically inherit their special grace. In a sense, this is true, as parents are often the most influential figures in their children’s lives. But the godliness of our parents does not automatically make us godly. This principle emphasizes the importance of our personal relationship with God.

In Jesus genealogy, one hand any king who had personal faith in God received His grace and became a good king. One the other hand, any king who lacked faith in God became a bad king. Once again, this leads us to an important lesson: the faith of our ancestors is not our own faith. We must have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ ourselves. We also need to recognize that it is God - our Sovereign God-who elects us, and our response to His grace is what truly matters.

Thirdly, the genealogy of Jesus reveals God’s unchanging love for all His people. One of the surprising things I have discovered anew in this genealogy is the inclusion of certain individuals, particularly the names of women. In those days, it was uncommon for Jewish genealogies to include females. If you read the family trees in the Books of Chronicles, you will see that they are

typically dominated by male names. But unlike those Jewish family origins, the genealogy of our Lord contains five notable women: “Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary.”

I want to briefly introduce several of these women. In Genesis 38, Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah... Although Tamar’s decision could be morally criticized and may not be acceptable by today’s standards, Matthew still includes her in the family tree of Jesus.

Other women in this family tree include Rahab, a Canaanite; Ruth, a Moabite; and Bathsheba, a Hittite. Like Tamar, most of these women were Gentiles, and each had been involved in some form of immorality.

If one of our family members were the mayor of a city or a member of the federal cabinet, we would likely mention that with pride. However, if our relative were convicted of a crime, we might be reluctant to share it. But the author of Matthew is very honest about the family origin of Jesus. As we have seen, some had good reputations, while others did not. Through Jesus’ family heritage, we understand that He came for all of us and identified with each of us, even in our struggles and failures.

Jesus does not care about whether we grew up as Presbyterians, United Church believers, Anglicans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Salvation Army members, Pentecostals, or anything else. According to some Bible scholars, Jesus’ genealogy reveals that “No one is outside of the family of Christ simply because of race, nationality, or personal background.” In other words, there is room for every kind of person in the family of God, and the church of Christ is open to all.

If the Gentile women-with immoral pasts-can be included in Jesus’ family, then you and I - sinners as we are - can be included too, as we come to Him with repentant and faithful hearts. This divine family tree illustrates that Jesus came for sinners like all of us.

To conclude, this morning we have learned about God’s faithfulness, His providence, and His abundant grace and love for us. Throughout Jesus’ family tree and the stories of those who came before Him, we can see Immanuel – “God with us.”

During this Advent season, God invites us to reflect on how He has been faithful to us personally, in our families, in our communities, and in our nation. He calls us to remember His promises to each one of us and how He has faithfully fulfilled them in our lives. He also invites us to think more deeply about our roots-not only physically, but spiritually. We are called to renew our faith in Him and strive to be more faithful followers of God, so that we too may be part of the history of God’s salvation and included in the genealogy of Jesus.

Amen.

**In preparing this sermon, I have drawn on thoughts from various sermons based on the text, Matthews 1:1-17.*