

The Genealogies of Christ

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel reading according to St. Matthew, we heard the long list of the genealogy of the Lord, as traced from the Patriarch Abraham, through the Prophet David and the captivity in Babylon, down to the Lord Himself.

This list includes the names of many holy and righteous people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ruth, Jesse, David the King, and others.

And without a doubt the Evangelist Matthew is showing here that the Lord is born of holy stock, that He is Himself the end of a long line of righteous people who not only served the Lord, but also looked to Him as the fulfillment of the Messianic promises.

Yet, if we examine the genealogy more closely we will see that the list also includes the names of many people who were not so holy and not so righteous.

For instance in the person of Tamar we see a woman who dressed herself as a harlot and came together with her own father-in-law, the result of which brought the birth of the twins Pharez and Zarah.

And we also see that Saint Matthew doesn't fail to mention that David the King begot Solomon in adultery, of her who had been the wife of Uriah. As we recall, Uriah was the man whom King David purposely sent into the front lines of battle in order to be killed so that when Uriah was out of the picture he could take for himself Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, the woman whom he had fallen into adultery with.

Now we may ask, why does the Evangelist Matthew include these people and their misdeeds in his genealogy? If he is trying to show that Jesus is the Christ, the long awaited Messiah, why does he mention that the Lord is descendent from sinners as well as saints?

Of course, the answer here is simple. The Lord willed to be born of such people for the very reason that they were sinners, because He as the Messiah was coming to sanctify them and to free them from their sins. In the Lord's own words He says that He has come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

And so, we see the Lord as the long awaited Messiah, as the expectation of the righteous and also as the redeemer of the unrighteous – as the fulfillment of the promise given to the great patriarch Abraham and as the hope of the repentant David who sought forgiveness for his sins.

Yet the genealogy of Christ tells us even more than this.

After recounting the list of names from Abraham to Christ, the Evangelist Matthew says, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the deportation to Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to Christ are fourteen generations."

This is something of an intriguing verse. Why does Saint Matthew divide the line of Christ into these three groups of fourteen generations? Is it simply to give more historical context or does he say this so that we might more easily visualize the ancestral tree of the Lord?

According to the Fathers, the reason the Evangelist divides the generations into three groups of fourteen is for neither of these reasons but rather because by doing so he further shows that this Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary is in fact the Christ.

The Fathers say that Saint Matthew divided the generations into three different conditions of leadership. And that he did this to show the Jews that although they were ruled by judges, as they were from Abraham until David, and by kings, as they were from David until the deportation, and by priests, as they were from the deportation until Christ, yet still they could not lay hold of eternal life because these earthly men could not lead them across the void of death, across that great chasm and through the valley of Sheol to the heavenly Promised Land.

And for this they needed the Messiah, the true Leader of the people of God, the true Judge and King and Priest, whose government would be on His shoulder, the One who would be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, who would, according to the prophecy, shepherd the Lord's people, Israel.

And so, we see Christ as not only the Judge of the living and the dead, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Great High Priest who offers Himself as our cleansing sacrifice, but also as the Good Shepherd who leads His sheep across the void of death to the green pastures of life in the heavenly Promised Land, the Kingdom of God.

And so the genealogy of Christ, reveals to us two things.

First, it reveals to us that the Messiah was born for all of mankind, both sinners and saints. There was not and is not one single person left outside the care of God. He has sent His Son into the world that all might be saved through Him, both the righteous and the unrighteous.

And second, the genealogy reveals that Jesus Christ as the Messiah saves us by becoming our Judge, King, and Great High Priest.

Through His Incarnation, the Lord teaches us how to judge rightly. And He gives this teaching in two ways – through His commandments, which tell us how to live rightly. And by giving us His Holy Spirit, who enables us to distinguish between what is of God and what is of men – to discern between what leads to life and what leads to death.

It is this discernment, this gift of the Holy Spirit, which allows us to judge ourselves and correct ourselves so that we might escape the judgment of condemnation in the Age to come.

Through the Lord's Incarnation, He also becomes our King. He comes to reign in our hearts and minds, establishing His Kingdom within us. He makes us joint-heirs, sons and daughters of God, and royal members of His Father's Heavenly Kingdom – a Kingdom whose peace knows no end.

And finally, through the Lord's Incarnation, He becomes our Great High Priest, for He has come to offer Himself up for the life of the world. Through His sacrificial death on the Cross, He has cleansed our sins, and instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion, by which we are sanctified by union with Him through His holy Body and precious Blood.

And so, brothers and sisters, as we find ourselves on the verge of celebrating the Incarnation of the Son of God, let us be reassured that the Lord has come to save each and every one of us, no matter how many sins we have committed, no matter how far we have fallen from His grace.

For the Lord has come to dwell within us, as the Judge who gives us the gifts of discernment and righteous judgment, as the King who makes us joint-heirs of His Father's heavenly kingdom, and as the Great High Priest, who cleanses us and sanctifies us, raising us up to a life of holiness and union with God.

To the Lord Jesus Christ, the long awaited Messiah and Savior of the human race, be the glory, together with His eternal Father, and His all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.