

**Readings:** *Micah 5:1 – 4 OR Romans 8:28 – 30; Psalm 12(13):6 & 7; Matthew 1: 1 – 23.*

Today's Gospel Reading is frequently read in its shortened form, beginning only at verse 18 – but that's a great mistake. Like the other Gospel writers Matthew doesn't record things simply because "that's what happened". The Gospels aren't biographies or histories. In everything they record there is a theological message – and that's true about the genealogy with which Matthew begins his Gospel. Actually Matthew seems to be making several theological points.

First: providing the list of ancestors emphasises that the birth of Jesus isn't "just something that happened": it's part of God's plan, made from ages past. And this carefully determined plan is emphasised in verse 17 (which is omitted from our reading) by the division of the list into three equal groups of fourteen names.

Secondly, there is a stress on Abraham, who begins the first group of fourteen, on David, who begins the second group, and on the end of the deportation to Babylon, which begins the third group. In each case God has made promises about future blessings. To Abraham there is the promise that *in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed*. To David there is the promise of an heir: *I will be his father and he shall be my son...and I will establish his throne for ever*. And through prophets at the time of the Return from exile in Babylon there is the promise of a renewed holy people and a restored holy city.

Thirdly, Matthew's list of ancestors includes four women – Tamar the mother of two of Judah's sons; Rahab the mother of Boaz, Ruth the mother of Obed, and Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. This is not the normal way of recording ancestry – but each of these women is an ancestress of Joseph. And in each case there is something irregular, out of the ordinary, in their relationships: Rahab and Ruth were Gentiles, while Tamar and Bathsheba were guilty of sexual misconduct. God has used these "irregularities" to bring about the fulfilment of his promises.

The list ends with a fifth departure from "the normal". God chooses Mary to be the virgin-mother of the one who will be the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises. Through Joseph Jesus is the legal (although not the physical) heir of Abraham and David. He is both Son of God and Son of David. Once more God has chosen as he wills to carry out his purpose of salvation.