

December 17, 2021
Liturgy of the Word
Gail Addis, IHM

Psalm 72: 1-2,3-4,7-8 Genesis 49: 2, 8-10 Mt. 1:1-17

My mom worked on our family genealogy and traced both sides back to early eighteen hundred, which in many respects is not far but that was where her interest led her. Sister Ann Gabriel had genealogy records going back many more years. Both women could do that much research because of white privilege. We take so many simple things for granted as white people.

African Americans did not have legal status until after the Civil War. Enslaved people were considered property and so were not included by name in most records before emancipation. Consequently, ancestors are much more difficult to find due to the limited nature of record keeping for blacks prior to the Civil War.

Techniques for tracing slave families before the civil war is quite different and more difficult than techniques used by whites. During and right after the Civil War four million enslaved individuals lived in the United States. If you are black and want to find your ancestors, you must start with the names of their white slave owners. Only after 1870 did like record keeping for African Americans begin.

What does all of this have to do with Jesus and the Gospel we just read? Matthew is writing primarily for people who have a connection to the Jewish faith and so understand the many references to Judaism that come up in his Gospel. Through genealogy, Matthew is establishing Jesus' place in the Jewish tradition. He is telling his readers/listeners that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's history.

Matthew also includes four women which is very unusual and surprising and breaks the pattern of A begot B and so on. With the inclusion of these women, genealogy shows two things:

First, that Jesus is in continuity with the great figures of God's people. He is son Abraham and son of David.

Second, Jesus' birth is out of the ordinary, surprising and breaks a pattern. Jesus is in the tradition, but he also confronts the boundaries of that tradition bringing them to fulfillment.

For us as white Christians with privilege, we see that Jesus did not cling to any positions of power or privilege, not with God or with creation. He emptied himself to become a needy baby, experiencing the whole of creaturely vulnerability even unto death. He was one of us. His ancestry

firmly roots him in history and in the earth. He took flesh from flesh and became human letting go of power and privilege.

In a few days we will celebrate the Incarnation. May we, like Jesus, let go of everything for the sake of God's beloved community. Then the words of the psalm will come true: Justice shall flourish in God's time, and fullness of peace forever.