

Dear Friend of the Missions,

Advent is a time to prepare for the celebration of Christmas. I know this is difficult because society has us overwhelmed with Christmas images, music and even parties. For the Church, the Christmas celebration begins with Vigil of Christmas and ends with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. Many people think that Christmas Day is the end of the celebration and not the beginning. I hope that you will be able to get some quiet, some prayer, some reflection as a way to appreciate the Christmas Mystery, and how it changes our lives. December 6 is the Feast of St. Nicholas. December 8 is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (Patronal Feast of the United States) and December 12 is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mary teaches us how to wait in joyful hope for the coming of the Lord. I hope that you are enjoying these meditations and that they nurture and support your faith (at least a little bit).

May your Christmas be filled with blessings, joy, peace and wonderful memories! God bless you all for your generosity to the missions!

Your comments are welcome!



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The Genealogy of Jesus

By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

One of the readings that I truly enjoy for the Christmas Masses is the Gospel for the Vigil Mass. It is the genealogy of Jesus from Matthew. It is hard to read, but worth the time.

A family record of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).

Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram.

Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon.

Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon whose mother had been the wife of Uriah, Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah. Abijah the father of Asa. Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah.

Uzziah was the father of Joram, Joram the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos of Josiah. Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his

brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. After the Babylonian exile Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor. Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud. Eliud was the father of Eleazar. Eleazar was the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. It was of her that Jesus who is called the Messiah was born. Thus the total number of generations is: from Abraham to David, fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian captivity, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian captivity to the Messiah, fourteen generations. (Matthew 1,1-17)

The readings and prayers of the last days of Advent recount the history, hopes and dreams of the people of Israel as they waited for the fulfillment of the promises that God made to their ancestors. The genealogy which appears above is one of the many that appear in the Bible. The compilers of the Bible used them to make connections from one generation to the next and helped the people to understand how God was active in every age in the lives of his people. When these names were read, the people could recall the story of those people, just like we remember the stories of our ancestors when their names are mentioned. Each name is a reminder of another incident of God reaching out to the people and the people's response.

This particular genealogy was used by Matthew at the beginning of his Gospel to show the connection between Jesus and the important people and events in the life of Israel. While scholars feel it is somewhat artificial, it serves the purpose of the author well. The list is organized in three sets of 14 (some believe that 14 was used because the consonants of David's name numerical add up to 14 in Hebrew). The first set begins with Abraham, who is the ancestor of the Israelites. The second set begins with David who was the founder of the Kingdom

of Israel. The third set begins with the return from the Babylonian exile, which is looked upon as the refounding of Israel. (Interestingly, many of the names in the third group are unknown in the Hebrew Bible). The list ends with the birth of Jesus which Matthew shows as a new beginning for the people and the fulfillment of their longings.

For most of us these lists seem insignificant, but if we look at them more closely we can learn a lot about the meaning of Jesus for our world. The list shows that Jesus is born into the human experience with all its successes and failures. As the names are recalled, we can easily see moments of faithfulness and moments of sin. The message is that God's gracious life is passed on through good people and bad people, faithful people and unfaithful people, acceptable and not acceptable people:

Abraham: the model of faith who trusts in God's promises even when they seem impossible. (Genesis 12,1-5)

Jacob: the son of Isaac who stole the birthright of his brother Esau. (Gen 27)

Tamar: the widow daughter-in-law of Judah who tricks her father-in-law into providing her with an heir when all other possibilities had been exhausted. His other sons were, by tribal custom, supposed to help her have an heir to her husband. (Genesis 38,1-30)



Rahab: the prostitute who helped Joshua's spies scout the Promised Land before the people entered. (Joshua 2)

Ruth: the Gentile who was faithful, loving and loyal to the family of her late husband. (Book of Ruth)

David: the king chosen by God to lead his people. He also coveted Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, his general. David forced the general to lead a battle so that he would be killed so that he could marry Bathsheba. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel and 1 Kings)

Rehoboam: the son of Solomon whose unfaithfulness included continuing to allow pagan worship and taxing the people to death. It was because of him that the kingdom split. (1 Kings 14,21-1)

Asa: a good king, but the Book of Chronicles judges him harshly when he turned to doctors instead of trusting in the Lord when his foot was wounded. (2 Chronicles 16,12-14)

Josiah: another good king who tried to restore the people to faithfulness to the Covenant near the time of the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel. (2 Kings 22-23)

All the names not known: a reminder that there are a lot of people involved in God's activity from age to age that are not famous or notorious.

So the history of Israel, just as all of human history, and just like our own history, had its ups and downs. If you look at the life of humanity as a beautiful tapestry made up of many threads, some perhaps more prominent than others, but all important to the fabric, then the list can be very inviting. The genealogy shows how the fabric unravels and, how in many ways, God has continued to try to repair the fabric. In the end, it seemed to unravel faster than God would have liked. He sent all kinds of people to turn things around, and still it kept unraveling. In the end, God did more than re-weave the fabric of humanity. He renewed and restored it by reworking the art and adding a beautiful golden thread: the Lord Jesus. This is the remarkable human family of the good and the bad, the

saints and the sinners, the famous and the unknown. Matthew tells us that Jesus was born into this family to heal and save it:

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, an upright man unwilling to expose her to the law, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream and said to him: "Joseph, Son of David, have no fear about taking Mary as your wife. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She is to have a son and you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." All this happened to fulfill what the Lord has said through the prophet Isaiah: "The Virgin shall be with child and give birth to a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel," a name which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke he did as the angel of the Lord had directed him and received her into his home as his wife. He had no relations with her at anytime before she bore a son, whom he named Jesus. (Matthew 1,18-24)

So we look forward to the coming of this Jesus who will set us free and save us from our sins. Our successes and faithfulness are blessed with his coming. Our failures and sins are healed by his coming. The tapestry of human life is all the more beautiful, renewed and recreated with the golden thread—Jesus, Emmanuel! **Merry Christmas!**

Reflection Questions

1. What does Christmas mean for you? How can you share the Christmas mystery with those you love? With the world you touch?
2. Can you notice how God continues to stop the unraveling of your life?
3. Do you believe that even when you are at your worst God might use you to answer someone's prayer?

Please remember our missionaries who
celebrate their birthdays this month:

Fr. Bartholmew McMahon, O.F.M. (Japan): December 2

Fr. Ignatius Harding, O.F.M. (Bolivia): December 2

Fr. Donald Chin, O.F.M. (Brazil): December 9

May God bless them and keep them safe.

Also
remember our former
missionary friars who are ill:

Fr. Campion Lally, O.F.M. (Japan)

Fr. Thomas Fox, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

Fr. Charles Finnegan, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Arthur Murray, O.F.M. (Southern U.S.)

Fr. Charles Steen, O.F.M. (Bolivia & Africa)

May God grant them health and strength.



There was no room for them in the inn.

Those words always strike me as I hear the Gospel proclaimed at Midnight Mass. As we walk through the streets and highways and byways of the world we live in, it becomes sadly obvious that there are still people who are homeless: for whom there is no room in the inn. Perhaps, as we remember the Lord who was born in a manger, we could commit ourselves again to doing something for the homeless. Please join in this prayer, and do whatever else you can to make sure that one day all people will have safe and adequate housing.

Litany for People Who are Homeless

L. We pray for peace and justice, mercy and forgiveness.

A. **Open our eyes that we may see!**

L. We pray for an end to homelessness and hunger, unemployment and sickness.

A. **Open our ears to the cries of pain and the call for help.**

L. We pray for those living on the streets, huddled in overnight shelters and living too many to a room. We pray especially for the children who are being raised without shelter or sleeping in cars.

A. **Open our hearts so that we may serve these little ones who are our brothers and sisters.**

L. We pray for the refugees of our world, those gathered in tent cities and camps, walking the face of the earth and without a place or a country to call home.

A. **Open our arms that we may welcome them with love.**

L. We pray for communities and people that serve the homeless and refugees. We give thanks to God for their ministry.

A. **May we join together to help so that they will know Emmanuel, the God who is with us. Amen.**