

Begat
Matthew 1:1 – 16; Philippians 2:5–11
Sunday, January 4, 2026 (Christmas 2)

Our next scripture reading is from Matthew's gospel, chapter 1, and it is the genealogy of Jesus. I actually want to ask all of you to pick up a Bible and follow along, because we're going to *hear* this in a different way today. A few years ago a musician named Andrew Peterson put the genealogy of Jesus to music, and that's how we're going to hear it. The song is called "Matthew's Begats," because in the King James translation of the Bible, it would say, "Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob," that word *begat* meaning "gave birth to," or, "brought about." [So I invite you to click here to follow along as we hear the word of God.](#)

I wanted us to hear this in a different way because a lot of the time we just kind of zone out during all of these, "so-and-so was the father of so-and-so," or we just skip it altogether. But it's actually *really important* in understanding who Jesus is and why he came.

We all have things about ourselves, and especially about our *families*, that we would like to *hide*. And it seems like those things always *come out* for everyone to see around Christmas.

Like in the movie *Christmas Vacation* when Cousin Eddie shows up and parks his big, nasty RV in the driveway and stands out there in a bath robe that's *way* too small, drinking a beer, while he unloads the septic tank into the storm drain. And everyone's just kind of like, "Nope. Don't know him. He's not in *our* family."

Or like in my family, growing up, we would always go out to my grandparents' house on Christmas morning (my father's parents). We'd open presents, and then my grandmother would start cooking Christmas dinner around 10 A.M. or so. And she'd start sipping on a glass of wine

while she was cooking. And then it would be like, a little in the *food*, a little for *her*. And before we know it, the whole *bottle* is empty and my Southern Baptist grandma is sauced at Christmas dinner. And everyone is all embarrassed and it's just kind of like, "Ugh. We don't talk about this. Let's just pretend this isn't happening."

We *all* have those *people* in our families that we want to *ignore*; just pretend like they aren't there. The crazy aunt who is convinced she can talk to dead people. The couple whose marriage is *falling apart*, but we all just pretend like everything is *fine*. The girl who's pregnant, and everybody *knows* about it, but no one's *talking* about it. The embarrassing secrets that we try to hide. All the *junk* about *ourselves* or about our *families* that we don't want to acknowledge or deal with, and it seems like it always comes out around Christmas.

Well, *Jesus'* family was the *exact same way*. If you think *your* family is messed up, you should take a look at *Jesus'* family tree. It's *filled* with all these people and situations that you just don't want to talk about or acknowledge. Not at all the family you would expect *God* to be born into.

It starts off respectably enough. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac was the father of Jacob, Jacob was the father of Judah. That's a solid start; these three great ancestors of our faith. But then it tells us that Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law. She dressed up like a prostitute to trick Judah into sleeping with her. So Judah was out strolling around town, looking for prostitutes apparently, and ended up having kids with his son's wife. That doesn't exactly make for the most romantic story. Imagine the family gatherings: "Grandpa, how did you and grandma meet?" "Well, I wouldn't want to bore you with the details."

Then it goes on nicely enough, Perez had Hezron, Hezron had Aram, Aram had Aminadab, Aminadab had Nahshon, Nahshon was the father of Salmon, and Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab. Rahab was a prostitute. Not just *pretending* to be one like Tamar. She *was* one. And not only *that*, she *wasn't Jewish*. That was actually a really big deal back then. Jewish people were forbidden from intermarrying. So, double whammy here.

It goes on again. Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth (who, *again*, wasn't Jewish). Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of King David (that would have been a proud moment in *anyone's* family tree), but then it says, "David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah." Not by *his own* wife. By *someone else's* wife. David fell in love with Bathsheba, but she was already married to Uriah, who was a soldier in David's army. So David sends Uriah up to the front lines of battle, where he will surely be killed, and when he *is*, David slides right in and marries his wife. Again, that was a big no no, according to Jewish law. Not exactly a sterling moment in the family history.

Then we go all the way down through all these other generations, until we get to Jacob, who was the father of Joseph, who was the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born. You notice, all throughout this list, it only mentions the *woman's* name when there's a *problem*. It doesn't say, "Jacob was the father of Joseph, who was the father of Jesus." Because he *wasn't*. He just happened to be *married* to the woman who *gave birth* to Jesus. There's that whole virgin birth thing; with child by the Holy Spirit, which I'm sure *everyone* bought back then, *especially* Mary's parents.

Jesus was born into a messed up family with all kinds of embarrassing secrets; stuff that people wanted to *hide*, they didn't want to talk about. They wanted to pretend like those people, those

incidents *weren't there*. And it all comes out around Christmas. Because we can't fully understand the *birth* of Jesus, until we understand the *family* that Jesus was born *into*.

When God became human, became *one of us* in Jesus, he wasn't born into some sterile, perfect environment. Jesus was born into poverty. Born in a stable where animals lived. Born in stink and squalor. Born into the dirt and mess. Born into a family with *problems*. A family that actually became refugees when they had to flee Israel to go to Egypt to escape King Herod. And a lot of times when we think about that, we think of it in terms of God lowering God's self, and the divine becoming human. Like when Paul says to the Philippians that in Jesus God was *emptied* and *humbled*, taking on the form of a slave or a servant. And that is *part* of it; the *divine* being *lowered*. But what's *also* happening there is that God, by becoming one of us, sharing life with us, God is *raising us up* and making this life, this humanity, a little more divine. God is *redeeming* it.

Look at it this way. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by his daughter-in-law Tamar. Not the proudest moment in the family history. But if that hadn't happened, Perez wouldn't have had Hezron, and Hezron wouldn't have had Aram, and Aram wouldn't have had Aminadab, and Aminadab wouldn't have had Nahshon, and Nahshon wouldn't have had Salmon.

Salmon had Boaz with Rahab, the prostitute. Again, not the proudest moment in the family tree. But we *need* Boaz. He's pretty important to this whole story. If that wouldn't have happened, Boaz wouldn't have had Obed, and Obed wouldn't have had Jesse, and Jesse was the father of King David. And we need King David. He was *hugely* important to this whole story.

King David had Solomon with the wife of Uriah. But if that hadn't happened, we go all the way down the family tree with a whole slew of *other* people who wouldn't have come along, until we get all the way down to Joseph and Mary and Jesus.

See, those ugly moments happened in their family tree; things they'd rather have hidden or ignored or forgotten about. But God *used* those ugly moments to bring about something *good*.

We *all* have things in our *families*, things in our *lives* that we are ashamed or embarrassed about. Things we'd rather hide or ignore or forget about. Mistakes and pain that we'd rather bury. But what we're reminded of in this season is that God *enters in* to all of that, raises it up, makes the human a little more divine. God *redeems* it. God takes our failures, our mistakes, our bad decisions, our pain, our embarrassments, our regrets and *uses* them to do something *good*. God says, "Yeah, this thing happened. But I'm going to use *that* to do *this*. And then *this* is going to lead to *that*. And then *that* is going to lead to *that*, until we get you where I need you to be."

I've shared with you before how, when I was a teenager, I got arrested for something that I didn't do. And at the time, it was *awful*; my whole life was falling apart. And it was so *embarrassing*. I didn't want my *grandparents* or all these other people knowing about that. But looking back, I can see how *that* experience led to all these *other* things that led to me embracing my faith and eventually becoming a pastor. And if *that bad thing* hadn't happened, who knows where I would have ended up.

Four years ago right now, I was in the middle of a three-month medical leave, dealing with stress and anxiety and burnout. It *felt* like everything was falling apart, and it was really embarrassing. I was ashamed to admit it and talk about it. But that painful experience led to this new

awakening in my life, this new experience of God's presence and love, and it helped me to *grow* in so many ways. If that bad thing hadn't happened, who knows where I would be today?

I'm not saying those things *had* to happen, like they were foreordained by God or *caused* by God. What I'm saying is that they *happened*. They *happen* because we live in a broken world that doesn't work the way God created it to work; a world where things go *wrong* and bad things *happen*. But when they *do* happen, God *uses* them to bring something *good* out of the *brokenness* and *pain* and *mess*.

What is it in *your* life? What has happened that, at the time, seemed like the end of the world, but *without* that thing, you wouldn't be *here* today; you wouldn't be *who you are* today? What mistake, what bad decision, what pain has God redeemed for *you*? What is God in the *process* of redeeming *right now*, that maybe you can't even *see* yet, and you're just being invited to *trust* in it?

This season of Christmas reminds us that God entered in to the mess and the dirt and the pain and the sin of this world to lift it up and make it a little more divine. Christmas is the *promise* that God is *with us* in all our junk, taking everything that we think is worthless and turning it into something of *immense worth*. Christmas is our assurance that there is *nothing* that is beyond the reach of God's redeeming love; no *person*, no *situation*, no *relationship* is too broken for God to use. God is with us in the *good*. God is with us in the *bad*. God is with us in the *joy*, and God is with us in the *pain*. God uses *all of it* to do something *new* in *us* and in the *world*.

So if you have been surrounded by family in this season, and there's been one of those moments where you're like, "Ugh, this *shouldn't* be *happening*. Don't *do* this. Don't *talk* about this. Am

I *really* a part of this family?” just remember that Judah had kids with his daughter in law, and it seemed like nothing good could come out of *that*.

Or if you’ve been *alone* in this season, and there’s *no* family around, or there *should* be family around, but something has *happened* that has *broken* your family, remember that King David had a kid with another man’s wife, and it seemed like nothing good could come out of *that*.

Or if something bad happens, something you weren’t expecting, and you don’t see any way that anything good can possibly come of this, just remember that *Mary* was an unwed teenage mother, and it seemed like nothing good could come out of *that*.

But God used *all* of it. God *uses* all of it still. Because God was *born into it*, and God experienced it *just like we do*. God is *with us*, redeeming this world, making *all things*, even *us*, new.