Matthew 1:1-6
Exhibit A: The Surprise
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The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram,[a] 4 and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of David the king.
And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,

I wonder where I came from. I wonder who and what kind of people are perched in the branches of my family tree. I'm not talking 2 and 3 generations, but 7, 8, 9 generations ago. What kinds of characters and whose stories are in my blood? Anyone famous? Do you ever wonder this? Well as you probably already know, ancestry research and genealogy study is a big deal these days, and not just recently with the onset of billion dollar companies, but pretty much as long as there have been families people have wondered about their ancestors—only they didn't have ancestry.com to tell them.

I read about a man from Boston, by the name of ____ Harper, who had heard through family lore that he was somehow connected to John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, but wanted to find out for sure. Harper had often felt inconsequential growing up in a poor family. He let his hardships shape him for the better and went on to serve others who did not have much by working as the Executive Director of Boston's Salvation Army.

Despite all of his good work, he still felt something was missing, so he went on PBS's Genealogy Roadshow and found out that he wasn't just related to 1 notable person from history, but 7. A few of the more well known ancestors in his family tree are:

1. Sixth Cousin twice removed Tennessee Williams
2. 8th Cousin twice removed Astronaut Alan Shepherd
3. 11th cousin twice removed Amelia Earhart
4. 11th Great Grandfathers John Winthrop and Thomas Dudley settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony

You never know what you might find, and you never know what you might find when you begin to unearth the past. All of us can learn and grow from knowing where we've come from, even if what we find is not all together positive. This is true of our life of faith, it's true of the family tree which we've been engrafted into by faith. Jesus was a human with a lineage, he had a physical DNA and a family heritage that went all the way back to Adam. And lurking in Jesus' family tree are all different types, all of whom in one way or another point us towards the mercy, grace, and identity that we can share with him. His family story is our family story too. That's what we're going to look at for these next four weeks of Advent as we study 1 chapter, 17 verses really, of Matthew 1.

Typically when we begin our read and reflection on Scripture with regards to the birth of Jesus in Matthew we begin at verse 18 where it says: "The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way." And after listening to me labor through only the first 6 verses, with 11 more in the genealogical record you can see why.

John begins his gospel before space and time, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God." It's poetic it's lyrical. "Luke begins with an orderly account that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Mark doesn't even bother, he just plows right into it: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Matthew: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ," and for many of us, myself included our eyes begin to roll back in our heads. But, not so fast. Here in this long list of excruciatingly difficult names lies the DNA of God's plan, the DNA of Christmas, the DNA of grace. It shows us that Jesus came from somewhere, that he has a history, he doesn't pop up from nowhere, but has roots that connect him with the long story of Israel's history. So that as Pilate's wife would later ask, "where are you from?" we see Jesus has a lineage. So we'd better pay attention, I hope this will help connect some of the dots between the Old and New Testament for you.

Chapter one begins by telling us that this is going to be the genealogy of Messiah Jesus the son of David and the Son of Abraham. Now Matthew lifts these two names out for two reasons I think, and not just because these are Jesus' two most famous relatives. Matthew is immediately garnering the attention and legitimacy from his Jewish audience.

Interestingly, Matthew traces Jesus family tree back from Mary to David, while Luke's genealogy in chapter 3 goes back to David from Joseph his earthly father's side.

David and Abraham are milestones of Israel's identity as the people of God. Each were given a facet of God's promise and plan for Israel.

Jesus – Deportation to Babylon 14 Generations
Babylon – David 14 Generations
David – Abraham 14 Generations

Not only is Matthew giving us milestones that orient us chronologically, but theologically as well. David and Abraham are THE pillar figures of Israel's history in the Old Testament, representing the promises God made to this small, set aside people. Through them God would reveal what life in faith with him would be for the world. Abraham representing God's first unique promise to miraculously create a people and nation where there was not, and where it looked impossible.

In Genesis 12:3 it says that God told Abraham—a nonagenarian whose wife Sarah and he had longed for children but had never been able to conceive--**"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

Abraham is the great patriarch of the Old Testament through whom God made the everlasting covenant that he would be their God, and they would be his people. The problem however, Abraham and Sarah have no children of their own, no line through whom that majestic promise of God could carry forward. Then in Genesis 15 God says to Abraham: **"Look toward heaven,**

and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." [6] And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."

But as we will see in just a few moments, that promise does not come without a shroud of intrigue and deception. A child comes, but not before manipulation and deceit.

From Adam to Abraham, 18 generations. Then 14 generations after Abraham came David.

After deciding that they didn't want to live intimately with God and be governed by his judges, Israel said: we want to be like all the other kids in school, so give us a king. Eventually the man anointed King over Israel would be the youngest and most unsuspecting in his family, from the smallest tribe of Israel, Benjamin. God chose David, because as it says in 1 Sam 13:14 he was a man after God's own heart. God told David, **"…I will establish the throne of [your offspring's] kingdom forever"** (2 Samuel 7:13). Through David's line another king would come, a Messiah who would redeem his people, and restore God's Kingdom on earth, and who would be called prince of peace, mighty God, Emmanuel.

14 generations after David, the people of Israel were carried into exile in Babylon. A result of a long line of disobedient rulers in Israel and God's decision to in a way reset his people, through this long and painful period of captivity. But during this dark and difficult time God sent prophets to call its leaders to return to God, and also to comfort the people in their afflictions. Two of these prophets reminded God's people to keep hope alive because God was getting ready to do something great

Isaiah 11:1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Jeremiah 23:5 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

All the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. Now you might be saying to yourself that seems pretty convenient, 14, 14, 14. Were there really exactly 14 generations between them? We actually have evidence to state that there were those that Matthew left off of these lists. So why does Matthew do it this way, why does he present this list in such a neat and tidy way?

There are some who use the examination of numbers and numerology to decipher meaning. As you know in the Roman alphabet letters represent numbers, and the same is true for the Hebrew language. Each Hebrew letter represents a different number. So, a common interpretation of this 14, 14, 14 is that the number 14 is represented by the three root letters of the word David. That 14, 14, 14 is emphasizing the point that the lineage of Jesus runs through David.

I am suspicious of using the Bible as a code book, because I believe as the early church fathers and reformers alike believed that the bible should be able to be read and understood by all people. And so what I see as I look at this list of names is God's specific purpose of revealing and redeeming all nations and all people through a list of selected people. God chose to covenant and bind himself to a specific people at a specific place in time, to make of them an example of living in relationship to

God for the purpose of redeeming the whole world, and bringing all people into relationship with him through himself incarnate, Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus.

And the more we look into the family tree of Jesus over the next few weeks, the more we will see that this expansive, all-encompassing work, for all people, is not exclusive in nature, but radically inclusive.

And what I want to do briefly in closing today is, with two examples from the lives of these two men, Abraham and David, make this point. God chooses to carry out his plan of salvation for the world through very flawed and human individuals, in spite of, not because of their actions. On the one hand both David and Abraham are lifted up as great heroes and patriarchs of our faith, but they both have very flawed scandalous pasts.

The genealogy begins with Abraham begetting Isaac. But did you know that Isaac wasn't Abraham's first son. In Genesis 16, just a few verses after God made the promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky, they begin to get impatient. And Abraham and Sarah take things into their own hands, Sarah recommends that Abraham be with their maidservant Hagar. And from Hagar Ishmael is born. Why aren't either of these two mentioned?

Then Isaac's twin boys Jacob and Esau, Esau was the first born, with his brother Jacob grabbing at his heel. Then later Jacob tricks his brother Esau out of the blessing from his father that was his birthright.

Then comes Jacob's son Judah and his brothers. Joseph was the best of the brothers, after being sold into slavery by his brother Judah, its Joseph who rises to second in command in Egypt and saves his people, while Judah was out sleeping around. And yet it's Isaac, Jacob, and Judah who are listed as the descendants from Abraham.

Then David, the great Catholic New Testament Scholar Raymond Brown calls David a "stunning combination of saint and sinner." After having an affair with Bathsheba, David arranged for the murder of her husband Uriah, so that he could legally marry her. David at times looked like a mafia Don, practicing politics by arranging for relatives to murder his opponents. And yet, he was the sweet singer of the psalms, the composer of prayers so beautiful that they have become a part of our worship on a weekly basis.

All of this from two, who if we were going to erect a Mt Rushmore of Christianity Abraham and David would be situated right behind Jesus. Why is this?

Because God frequently does not choose the best or the noble or the saintly to carry out his purposes. God is not controlled by human merit, but chooses to be gracious to whom he is gracious. It's no wonder here that in these examples the reformers of the church saw their Reformation Theology, a theology of salvation by grace. It is not by the goodness of our heart or our actions that God offers his salvation, but by sheer grace, which can overcome sin—no matter the depth.