

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Genealogy, Not Genetics”
Matthew 1:1-17
Luke 3:23-38**

**Third Sunday of Advent
December 16, 2018**

Matthew 1: selected verses

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers... [who was the ancestor of] Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah... [who was the ancestor of] Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So 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.

Luke 3: selected verses

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli... [the ancestor] of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz... [the ancestor] of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

“Genealogy, Not Genetics”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Back in 1953, when Watson and Crick discovered the double-helix pattern of DNA, they exclaimed that they had “discovered the secret of life.”¹ Indeed what wondrous secrets DNA has revealed. It’s been used to put prisoners behind bars and release those wrongly accused. It’s been used to chart the expansion and adaptation of the human race. It’s even been used a little closer to home. Many of you know this heartwarming story. As a gift, Al and Jeannie gave their son Mike one of those Ancestry.com DNA tests. When Mike finally got the results of that test, he discovered that his birth mother was also on Ancestry.com. There was some hesitation from Mike, but eventually he was reconnected with his birth mother, and I think he’s very happy. I know she came and worshiped with us earlier this year. Mike and many others have benefitted from the microscopic memory of DNA.

You see, without the study of genetics, none of these advances and discoveries would’ve been possible. Personally, ever since I learned about Gregor Mendel and the Punnett Square, I’ve always had a fascination with genetics and DNA. And now, with a baby on the way, Betsy and I are curious to know which traits our child will inherit. Genetics is an important part of human life. Because of genetics we are able to know who we are and where we come from. Doctors are able to trace conditions, disorders, and other health issues through genetics. Having said that, genetics hasn’t always been a field for positive advancement. There was a time when people used genetics to disenfranchise different races. Not too long ago the area of eugenics was very popular. They believed that through selective breeding practices, the human race could make

itself pure. Now, I can see the draw of this, but who decides what's "impure"? Fifty, sixty, seventy years ago interracial marriages were illegal because of this misconstrued look at genetics. In an interesting twist, I read a recent article in National Geographic Magazine about a pair of twins born to a British mother and a Jamaican father. These were fraternal twin girls, one clearly Anglo and the other clearly Jamaican.² Much to the chagrin of eugenicists, while it makes us what we are, DNA has no respect for who we are. And in a lot of ways, DNA is a little stamp from God.

While the ancients knew little of DNA, they knew much about genetics. We see both Luke and Matthew taking the time to detail the bloodline of Jesus Christ. Luke's is intriguing because it starts the way I would start my family tree, with me. He works backwards starting with Jesus and ending with Adam. Matthew's is also intriguing, but for different reasons. Considering the time period, his has three unusual inclusions. In verses five and six of Matthew one, you'll notice he includes Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. A prostitute, a foreigner, and a victim of lust. Three "impure" women, and yet without them there would be no King David, and ultimately no Jesus of Nazareth. I wonder if Matthew's prologue surprised his first readers, for they would have immediately recognized the implications. Add Luke's list into the mix and we have an ancestry leading all the way to "the son of God." Another shocking conclusion for the earliest readers.

Both Matthew and Luke establish for us that Jesus had the right heritage. For good or ill, human nature has a way of labeling the "right families." To this day, many of you speak positively and fondly of the Lane family. And indeed, Altavista would not exist had it not been for that family. But look at what has happened. Their factory is no longer here. Their children no longer live in this community. But that, too, is the nature of the human race. We are terminal. Generations come and go, and while some dynasties last for centuries, others are short-lived. For Jesus to have such a bloodline is a miracle in and of itself. But did he?

Look at Matthew 1:16. We read, "Jacob the *father* of Joseph the *husband* of Mary, *of whom* Jesus was born, who is called Christ." It's very subtle. Maybe the difference will be made clear when we look at this little inclusion in Luke 3:23, "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being (*as was supposed*) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli," etc. Luke makes clear what Matthew glosses over. This ancestry is not actually Jesus'. Both of these genealogical reports belong to Joseph, who, if you remember, is not Jesus' father.

One of Betsy's good friends will never be a biological aunt. She's an only a child and her husband's sister won't be having children. So she's laid claim on "Auntie" status to our child. Well, she originally said "pseudo-aunt," but Betsy told her there's nothing pseudo or false about it. She can and will be an aunt to our child. Just because we are not blood does not mean we cannot be family. Thinking back to Mike's story. Just because he has reconnected with his biological mother does not render Jeannie any less his mom. The same is true with all adopted families, whether formal or informal. We don't have to be related to be family. And this is very good news for us.

While Jesus was not a blood kin to Joseph, it does not make him any less an inheritor of his ancestry. Joseph had the right lineage and the right bloodline. Because he adopted the Christ child as his own, Jesus, born of Mary, became a legal and real descendant of King David. This is the punchline of Advent and Christmas: DNA can't connect us to God, only the blood of Christ can do that. We are not natural inheritors of the Kingdom of God. None of us has the pedigree that Joseph had. But even Joseph's genetics could not save him. He, too, needed the blood of the Lamb. Our sinfulness, the sinfulness of the human race, has made us children of wrath. We *don't* have the right genetics. But we do have the right genealogy. Though we are sinners, God adopts us through the work of his only begotten Son. Because of the blood of Christ, we can inherit the blessedness of God's grace and love.

Shortly we'll partake of the Lord's Supper. The Passover meal from whence this originated was a family tradition rooted in the Exodus. Jesus celebrated the Passover with his adopted family, the twelve Disciples, the Church. That moment of breaking bread together, no longer as strangers nor even as friends, but as brothers, that opened the door for us. When we celebrate Communion, we remember an act of love that is greatest among all, the sacrifice of our Lord. By the shedding of his own blood, we receive the forgiveness that is necessary to be adopted into the household of the Father. But that is not all. We, too, are charged with the same call to openness. Faith is not limited by race, language, or nationality. A person born again in Christ is a new creation. That means the old dividing lines of hostility are shattered. That means the old way of living is put to death. That means the love of sinning is cast from the heart. That means the hate and fear so prevalent to our nature is given up for a love that prays for stranger and enemy just as we pray for our brethren. Our adoption by God means we are no longer tied to the genetics of death, but are freed and welcomed into the genealogy of heaven. To live as Christmas people is to live into and out of this spirit of freedom and hospitality.

Let us pray. Most Holy God, you broke into the mess of this world through the birth of a fragile and helpless babe. You came to us that we might one day come to you! Too often we ignore you. We ignored you then, and we ignore you now. We blind ourselves with human standards for what we consider right. Our genetics are hardwired for selfishness, but you call us to humility. Through Christ, you have bought us and freed us from that bondage. In Christ we are new creations with a genealogy that reaches far and wide. By Christ we are adopted into an ancestry that is willing to brave the ravages of this world to share your gospel. May our lives be sacrifices of praise of our Savior, born to us on Christmas day. Amen.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA#History>

² <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/04/race-twins-black-white-biggs/>