

18 December 2003
Advent Midweek 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Jesus: Descended from . . . who?”

Text: Matthew 1:12-16 (Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Luke 1:46-55)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Genesis chapter 3, God made a promise to Adam and Eve. In Genesis chapter 12, God made that same promise to Abraham, and then repeated it shortly thereafter also to Isaac and Jacob. And then in First Samuel, God made the same promise to David. That from their lineage, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, would be born. . . . These past two weeks, we have been considering how God kept those promises, and that it certainly wasn't easy by any worldly standards. The sin in the world reared its ugly head even among those chosen to be the human ancestors of God's Son. Jesus was descended from some pretty notorious sinners, *and* He was descended from some pretty notorious kings – some of the worst that Israel ever had, in fact. . . . But through it all, God was working, and God was faithful.

Tonight, we heard the final third of Matthew's genealogy, and if first we saw that Jesus was descended from sinners, and then next we saw that Jesus was descended from kings, tonight we see that Jesus was descended from . . . *who?* The list of names that we heard tonight is a list of people that we know very little to nothing about. These are folks who lived in what is called the “intertestamental” period – the 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and start of the New Testament. Some of these folks we might be able to find out about in some of the extra-biblical writings from this period, but not very much. By and large, they are anonymous. Men who lived without any knowledge that they would be in the line of ancestors of the Saviour of the world.

But therefore, although they are anonymous, they are not unimportant! Indeed, they are very important. Just as important as all the earlier names in the genealogy. For even though they could perhaps be called “nobodies,” the reality is that that is true of all the people in this list of Jesus' genealogy – until God came to them. **Abraham** was a nobody, living in Ur of the Chaldeans, until God chose Him and made Him the father of many nations, with descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore. **David** was a nobody, a shepherd, the youngest of all the sons of Jesse, until God chose Him to be His King and progenitor of His Son. . . . This is true of more

recent examples as well. Consider the apostles – none there that anybody would have fingered for greatness. And what about Martin Luther? He was just a little monk in a little monastery. And then what of Jesus' earthly parents? A tradesman, and just another young lady waiting for a husband.

It is as we heard in the first reading from Deuteronomy: ***“The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers . . .”***

It is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping His oath. Love and faithfulness. Those are the only two reasons. If we want to find any other reasons, something that was within these people, some skill or attribute, something that made them rise above the crowd, we will search in vain. . . . It was simply because ***“God so loved the world,”*** and according to His plan was making ready the way for His Son to come into this world, that through His death and resurrection, we might have the promise and hope of everlasting life through faith in Him.

And so perhaps tonight, in this last third of Jesus' genealogy, we can realize and understand that God uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary. God chooses ordinary people and through them does extraordinary things. God chooses ordinary people and through them is born His Son. God chooses the most ordinary and simple things on earth – water and bread and wine – and yet through these means gives faith and the forgiveness of sins. . . . We don't have to be extraordinary – He is.

And the song of Mary we heard in the second reading from Luke, the Magnificat, (which we also sang earlier) says the same thing. God has done great things. Those who think they are extraordinary God puts down and humbles. Those who are nothing He exalts and raises up and uses to do His extraordinary things. Indeed, ***“He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring forever.”***

And so this is true also for you and I today. God is using the ordinary to do the extraordinary. Make no mistake about it. The things that we do in this life may seem very ordinary and mundane, and yet God is working through them. And so when parents raise their children in the fear and knowledge of the Lord, that is an extraordinary thing. When we are good neighbors, faithful friends, and love our neighbor as ourselves, that is an extraordinary thing. When we speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, when

we gather to hear God's Word, when we pray, when we give, those are extraordinary things. And they are extraordinary not because they are so great in and of themselves, and not because of the probably-ordinary person doing them, but because God is using you to do His extraordinary work. Not because He has to, but because He has chosen to. Providing daily bread, granting care, giving faith – doing these extraordinary things through ordinary people.

And so the names we heard tonight are names we have probably never heard before and, perhaps, will never hear again! Jesus descended from who? But that's okay. God knows who. They were chosen by Him, and remembered by Him, and recorded by Him. And you also. For you also were chosen by God and are precious to Him. Not because you are the best, or the highest, or the strongest, or the brightest, but because you are precious to Him. You are here at this time and at this place according to His plan. And know that just as these "nobodies" were both remembered and recorded by God, so your name is too. Remembered and recorded in the Book of Life.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please rise for prayer.