

*Of the Father's Love Begotten* Matthew 1:1-18; Luke 1  
Advent Luncheon #1 Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV December 2, 2015

- 1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
- 2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;
- 3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;
- 4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;
- 5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;
- 6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;
- 7 And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;
- 8 And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;
- 9 And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;
- 10 And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;
- 11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:
- 12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;
- 13 And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;
- 14 And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;
- 15 And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;
- 16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.
- 17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. (previous 17 vv. KJV)
- 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ<sup>[e]</sup> took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed<sup>[f]</sup> to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. (vs 18 ESV)

It may have been quite some time since you actually read, or heard, those first 17 verses of Matthew's Gospel. We like to skip over to verse 18: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place this way.

We're not so much on genealogies. They were pretty big stuff in the days when the Bible was written – Mathew begins with it. Luke has the genealogy of Jesus in chapter 3 between His baptism and the beginning of His public adult ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing.

“What has caused the change?” I have been musing.

Gabriel came to the virgin lass Mary, in chapter 1 of Luke, with some pretty astounding news: she was going to birth the Holy One, to be named Jesus, and to be called Son of the Most High, and He would be conceived not by any earthly father, but by the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:26-35)

Then the very next words from the mouth of this heavenly messenger:

***“And now, your relative in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her, who was said to be barren.”*** (Luke 1:36)

“Exit stage left, angel” and in the very next verse:

***“Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.”***

[P A U S E]

It came one day, without warning, as most important messages and message bearers do. The return address on the envelope said “Mary” and a last name he did not recognize. He was tempted to, and perhaps came close to, throwing the envelope unopened into the trash as another unwanted solicitation letter. But, a still, small voice in the back right quadrant of his brain whispered: “It IS handwritten, after all; open it.”

And so he did. After the salutation to him and his wife by name, it began wisely with a quick identification. It was “Mary Susan,” now married and hence the unrecognized last name. She had been in his youth group in Church when he was young in the practice of law and young in the practice of parenting. He didn’t know how to do either very well, he felt (particularly in the parenting part. But those teenagers in the Youth program thought he knew all kinds of things about life – more than their own parents did, they thought. Mary Susan had often babysat for them, with their two young children.

Mary Susan explained briefly where she is in life now and why she wrote this letter out of the clear blue these decades later. She wrote about all the things she remembered that he and his wife had done for her. Either he didn't realize it at the time, or he had simply forgotten, but Mary Susan's memory was much clearer than was his. Then, after some generalized language about "life taking some unplanned twists and turns" – as it does with so many people, she said – she wrote: ***"the greatest gift you both gave me was helping build the foundation of my faith. During [those hard times] my faith has gotten me through and I don't think I would have the relationship with the Lore I deo now, if you both hadn't planted the seeds. I just wanted you both to know how much you impacted my life and how much I appreciate all the time you invested in me."***

Wow! Truth be told: he may have invested as much time as he did in the Youth Fellowship because he didn't feel as awkward with those teenagers as he did with his own children, who regularly made him feel that he had no clue how to be a parent.

[P A U S E]

Mary, the virgin mother of God, stayed with Elizabeth, the scripture tells us for the last three months of Elizabeth's miracle geriatric pregnancy, until she bore the child, John – later John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus 30 years later.

Although none of the Gospels mention what I am about to reference, I also note that none of the Gospels talk about Mary breast feeding Jesus, changing his diaper, nor potty training Him. But I'm pretty sure she did. As I have meditated on that holy birth, I also have a good notion that Mary, along the way, also probably gave thanks for what she had learned from Elizabeth about complicated, socially unaccepted pregnancy, in a culture where gossip and rumor were as effective as in 21<sup>st</sup> century, when something "goes viral" in social media.

How thankful was Mary for Elizabeth, to whom she fled, when her own parents just couldn't do what she needed from them at the time.

And If Mary had ever told Elizabeth of this thankfulness, I can picture Elizabeth saying, ***"Chil', I wanted to spend time with you, instead of all those busy bodies in town, who kept patting my stomach, winking, and making some little smirk laden***

**reference to how my husband Zechariah wasn't telling anyone how, or by whom, "my family way" happened.**

Genealogies are so boring to us today, because we are so hung up on how much we do for ourselves. Those genealogies don't speak of anything those people do, except "BEGATTING."

No ... they don't speak of actions taken. **They speak of relationship** ... those who have gone on before and those who are to follow.

Jim Mowery, a recent resident of the Crossroads Men's Shelter, who last week boarded a bus to Long Beach, California to winter with his "step-daughter, who adopted [him]" is keeping a journal of that cross country bus trip to share with me, when he returns sometime in 2016. I knew I'd picked the right person for this job, when he pulled a little marble covered notebook out of his shirt pocket and said, "Like this?"

I told him what I had in mind for him to write about, and he turned a couple pages in his little book, handed it to me, and said, "Like this?" And I read his handwritten note:

***"We did not inherit this earth from our parents; we have it on loan from our children."***

I handed the notebook back to him and said, "Yeah, you know what I'm talking about."

Anyone who writes in his personal journal the words: ***"We did not inherit this earth from our parents; we have it on loan from our children."*** understands the importance of genealogies.

Here we are in the first week of Advent, and I'm doing several things differently this year. One thing: I'm realizing how really important is much that has been passed along to me – and neither I nor the one passing along realized at the time just how important it would turn out to be. **"BEGOTTING" the King James Version calls it.**

The words given to a hymn composed 1,000 years ago, and still in our United Methodist Hymnal, capture its importance: ***Of the Father's Love Begotten ...***

- Who has begotten unto you those perhaps unspoken, and yet important, values that shape your Christmas 2016?
- If you stopped and thought about it, is there someone you wish you could call and thank?
- Have you been begetting, as well? So often we do it unintentionally – just in our living.

As I was writing this wee Advent Luncheon devotion yesterday, my cell phone rang – a call from what used to be my office number – ALMOST A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO.

My former, first assistant, now has been sitting behind what used to be my desk, for the past eleven years. He's one of two finalists for a gubernatorial appointment to be a circuit court judge. He expects to hear one way or the other in the next few weeks.

He said he ran into a United Methodist Woman from their town, who had heard me speak a few weeks back at the Conference United Methodist Women annual event in Lewisburg. He said he realized, as she spoke, that he owed me a telephone call. He said he wanted to call and thank me ... and then he went on to speak of things that I had done to shape his life and career.

I can't remember ever doing any of those things to shape him. I just did things. I just ... I paused to realize ... I had been begotten by those before me and I had done some begetting on my own.

But, in the midst of thinking on Mary Susan, Blessed Virgin Mary, and Elizabeth, this phone call took on an eerie sensation.

So, let me **urge** you, as you head down this Advent Path toward Christmas, think about the importance of genealogy. Let me **urge** you to find some time for reflecting on "being begotten" and "begetting," and for humbly giving thanks.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.