

That has to be the most boring passage in the Bible. The only excitement is wondering if I'll ever make it to the end. Whenever I read the genealogy of Jesus, so many eyeballs start to roll that I can hear them. Even if you have the patience to check out what Matthew says, his genealogy is puzzling. If you compare Matthew's version with the ones in Luke or in the Old Testament, they don't all agree. Matthew left out a few generations and stuck in a few others. He makes a big deal out of these 3 groups of 14 generations, but his middle 14 have one more than the other two 14s have. I guess he was so anxious to show that Jesus was a son of Abraham who received God's promise and a son of David the mighty king, that he lost count, or he hoped we would.

Matthew did something unique with his genealogy. He included a few women. But – typical male – he only names the women who caused the most embarrassment to the family. For instance, Tamar and Judah were the parents of Perez, but Tamar was not Judah's wife. She was his daughter-in-law. Tamar disguised herself and seduced Judah. They had twins. Rahab was a prostitute. God only knows if she and Salmon were married when she gave birth to their son Boaz. Boaz turned around and married Ruth; she's in Matthew's list too. Ruth was not Jewish; Boaz had no business marrying her, and she's the grandmother of the great kind David. Then Matthew doesn't let us forget how David continued this family tree. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. David then put Bathsheba's husband on the front lines of battle, where he died, gloriously for his country, and conveniently for the king, who married the newly-widowed Bathsheba since she was already pregnant with the heir to the throne. You think Queen Elizabeth has problems. Oh, there's one more woman Matthew mentions: Mary. She conceived a child before she married Joseph. Quite a family tree, isn't it? Incest, prostitution, racism, adultery, murder, and out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Matthew flags every one of them across 42 generations – maybe 43.

How about your family? What's in your family tree? Some of this stuff? Abuse, abortion, jealousy, greed? If you wrote up your family tree, would you put that stuff in there? Matthew did. He basically says, "You think you got dirty laundry? Let me tell you what God can do with dirty laundry. God can save the world; God can save the world with it."

Sometimes we get embarrassed by our family, our friends, the kids, our country, or our church. We feel embarrassed by the decisions of some politicians and the behavior of some clergy. And if we're truthful, every one of us here, we've done plenty to embarrass our families ourselves. But there's nothing we've done that cannot be fixed. There's nothing we've done that was not fixed one wintry night in Bethlehem long ago. Because of that night, we know we are loved; we are worthwhile; we are forgiven.

The birth of one child has ended our shame. What child is this? That child is Jesus.