

What's in a Name?

That's my favorite gospel reading! Yours, too?

Let's have a little quiz, shall we?

We know that Abraham begat Isaac and that Isaac begat Jacob, but do you remember who Hezron begat?

Right! It was Ram!

Ram. That could actually be a Filipino nickname, don't you think?

Let's see how that might go ...mostly just from my own adoptive Filipino family ... but I'm sure you have some like these, too!

Ram begat Jun ... who was the father of Dado ... who begat Picting ... who begat Epoy ... who was the father of Pilo ... who begat Buboy ...and so on!

Seriously, few people can recite that genealogy from Matthew's gospel without stumbling over at least some of the names.

I've already demonstrated that I certainly can't do it!

But that genealogy is very important!

Notice that St. Matthew spends a lot of time at the very beginning of his gospel with this little bit of history.

He did it because he was writing primarily to the Jews ... who were looking for a messiah who had to be a descendant of King David. Matthew needed to show that Jesus had the credentials required of the job ... that is, that he was of the Davidic line. In fact, he was of the Line of David through both his mother, Mary, and through his adoptive step-father, Joseph.

Have any of you ever delved far back into your own family histories?

You never know what you might find.

One of my relatives researched the genealogy on my father's side all the way back to England before the founding of the United States. She found that we had relatives who fought against the British in the Revolutionary War and on both sides of the U.S. Civil War.

And sometimes our research can turn up some best-forgotten relatives, even some unsavory people who are just hanging there in our family tree ... some literally.

I remember a placard in a restaurant I visited once which said:

“My parents were in the Iron & Steel business. My mom ironed and my father stole.”

That reminds me of the story of a family patriarch who had distinguished himself in the world of business and high finance and was contemplating retirement.

His family got together to discuss what they could give him ... a man who seemingly already had everything!

After much thought, they agreed to commission a well-known biographer to write a book about the family's history.

The writer then sat down to interview family members, sort out and read family letters and sift through old documents so that he could produce an interesting story.

Then he discovered something in the family's history that could ruin the whole project.

There in black and white was a newspaper clipping about Uncle Harry. It seems that he was convicted of murder and was sent to the state penitentiary where he died in the electric chair!

“Could we just leave him out?” the family asked.

But the biographer reasoned that that would leave a gaping hole in the carefully crafted family tale!

After some deep thought, however, he came up with this ingenious solution:

At the end of that chapter, he wrote: “Uncle Harry occupied a chair of applied electronics at a famous government institution. He was attached to his position by the strongest ties ... and his death came as a terrible shock.”

Actually, there are some names in St. Matthew's genealogy that could very well fit that same mold.

Foremost, there was King David himself, whose son, the famous Solomon, was born as a result of adultery between David and the wife of Uriah, the general of David's armies, who David had killed.

You see, even such blatant sinners as King David can be forgiven and rehabilitated and go on to become a hero of the Jewish people.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul, when he was known as Saul, had Christians arrested, beaten ... and even killed ... before his own conversion.

We're not likely to be involved in anything as terrible as those two, but we are still all sinners.

We're fortunate that Christ Himself, that direct descendant of Abraham and of David, came so that we could be forgiven for our sins.

Just last night we held a communal penance service in the main church where numerous priests from around the diocese came to hear our confessions and grant us absolution through the sacrament which Jesus gave us, the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As Christians, we have no doubt about Jesus's lineage ... or that He is the Messiah. After all, we not only have Matthew's genealogy but we also have the Bible's assurance that Jesus is actually the "Son of God"!

Unfortunately, the Jews didn't know about the Angel Gabriel's visit to Mary and they probably wouldn't have believed it if they had known. After all, would you believe your teenage daughter if she became pregnant and then told you "God did it!"?

But show the Jews that genealogy and they can believe it because Jesus was legally Joseph's son and Joseph was an heir, however distant, to the throne of King David.

Notice that earlier I described Jesus as being Joseph's adopted son. He accepted and raised Jesus as His own.

Likewise, we, too, are God's adopted children, and just as adoption makes one a legitimate heir, those who do the adopting – in this case God – show their love by their acceptance of the adoptee just as they would one of their own flesh and blood.

I'm glad that I'm an adopted member of the Filipino community and I'm especially grateful to God for His loving acceptance of me as an adopted Son of God.

Sisters and Brothers, we are God's children ... adopted through Christ's sacrifice as He became human ... suffered ... died ... and rose again ... all for us!

What greater love can there be?

As we await the coming of Christ during this Advent season, let us keep that pure and sacrificial love in our hearts.

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Based on the Gospel of Matthew 1:1-17