

**PASTORAL SERMON**  
**The Sunday Before the Nativity**  
**By V. Rev. Timothy Baclig**  
**December 22, 2018**

Each year, on the Sunday before Christmas in all Orthodox Churches we hear the genealogy of Jesus, recorded at the beginning of Saint Matthew's Gospel (1:1-25). It is actually one of two genealogies on Jesus presented by the Gospel writers in the New Testament of the Bible. The other is found in the Gospel of Saint Luke. In St. Luke's Gospel, however, the genealogical list is in reverse order, beginning with Jesus and ending with Adam. Each Gospel writer had his own reason for presenting a lineage. In fact, the names included in one Gospel, as well as those that were not included in the other, were intentional choices by each writer for the purpose of making a point.

St. Matthew's genealogy is chosen because it reveals that Christ truly became a man, taking on our nature. We hear from the text of the *Synaxarion*: "He was not a ghost, an apparition, a myth, a distant imagined god, or the abstract god of philosophers; such a god does not have a family tree. Our God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He has flesh and blood, human ancestors—many of whom sinned greatly, like David, who also repented greatly."

**The value of the Gospel genealogies lies not in their legal or historical accuracy but rather in their spiritual meaning, they place an emphasis upon the fact that Christ did in fact become a man, but they also demonstrate the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Man's failure did not mean that it was all over, or that God had failed!**

Unique to the genealogy of Jesus in St. Matthew's gospel is that women are included, while in St. Luke's Gospel, they are not. In fact, one of the women mentioned, whose name is Rahab, was a Gentile prostitute. The list also includes: Tamar, who committed incest, Ruth a Gentile, and even the adulteress, Bathsheba. David is mentioned, who not only committed murder, but was also an adulterer. **St. Matthew intentionally demonstrates that the Lord's incarnation was the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. By being born a man in human flesh, the Lord completely identified with the human race, with men and women of flesh and blood, failings and all. And this is what Christmas is all about.**

Again from the text of the *Synaxarion* we hear: "By taking on human nature, the Son of God became like us in all ways, in flesh and blood, in mind and soul, and in heart and will. He differed from us in only one way: He did not sin. Since we know that

Christ's human nature remained sinless, He is also fully divine, and He shows us the way in which we can avoid sin, and so improve and transform our human nature.”

**St. John Chrysostom says that Christ was not embarrassed by the *skeletons hidden in His ancestors' closets*. The conclusion of the genealogy is the beginning of a new generation – the age of the Messiah – and we are part of it as Christians. The age of preparation and promise is over; the *fullness of time* has arrived – a new age of completion and fulfillment.** Very shortly we will celebrate what is the culmination of this wondrous season: It is the Great Feast of Holy Theophany: The baptism of our Lord by John in the River Jordan. It is the Feast which is the full revelation of God as Trinity: the Divine Son of God as *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world*, the descent of the Holy Spirit and the confirming word of God the Father.

### **Prayer**

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, Son of David, Son of Abraham, the Son of Mary, as we behold your humble birth, we pray Thee: be merciful unto us sinners, and renew us by your presence, cleansing us from all sin as we now draw near to Thy holy table and dare to partake of your Holy Body and precious Blood. Sanctify our souls, purify our thoughts, cleanse our minds and deliver us from the Evil One. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory: of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; now and ever, and unto ages of ages. A-men.