



# Allocutio



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Allocutio: Jesus embraces humanity.

The genealogy that St. Matthew gives at the beginning of his Gospel may seem like a long boring list of names. At one time I hated reading it. And you have those jaw breakers like Shealtiel or Amminadab. It reminds me of the story, perhaps apocryphal about President Bush after a certain president of Serbia died, "Well that is one impossible name I don't have to pronounce in the future!".

But the list is fascinating and we can learn much from it. It mentions four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. These are all part of line that Jesus came from. And they are all gentiles, not one of these women was a Jew. And since the Jewish custom has always been that the faith of the children is determined by the woman this had significance for Matthew who was already giving a clear message about the significance of Jesus: he came for all humanity, not just the Jews. He returns to this theme in many ways later: the wise men from the East being the most appropriate to recall at this time of year.

But that is not all. The manner in which these women came to be part of the Jewish tree is telling an even bigger story.

Tamar was the wife of Judah's son Er. By the way if you want to read all this up go to Genesis 38. Around that part of Genesis you will find anything that came up in Dallas or Desperate Housewives! Anyway Er dies without having a child and as you will recall from the question put to Jesus by the Sadducees it was necessary for the next brother to try and give her a child. The next son Onan wasn't that keen on Tamar and spilt the seed, for which he died. After some time Tamar played a trick and disguised herself as a harlot. She inveigled Judah into sleeping with her but took from him some items like a ring and watch (today's terms) and also asked him to give her a kid goat. When he came back with the goat she could not be found and no one knew of her. Three or four months later Judah heard his daughter-in-law was pregnant and by the law in use she deserved death. Summoned to him she showed the ring and watch and he realised who she was: the mother of his offspring, Perez and Zerah as it turned out. So that messy, seedy, sinful event is part of Jesus genealogy. Jesus didn't have to do a TV series on "Who do you think you are?" to find all that out.

It doesn't end there. Rahab was the famous harlot of Jericho who let the Jewish spies get into Jericho before it was raised to the ground. Rahab was spared and taken in by the Jews. She also becomes part of Jesus background".

But these women, shrewd and calculating and sinful and the Jewish men they cavorted with adopted and passed on something we all have today: the faith in the one true God. In the case of Ruth this is especially shown. You remember Ruth's story. Naomi, a Jewish woman who fled Israel in a famine, had two sons who took wives from the surrounding peoples. When her sons died and the famine abated she opted to return home. One daughter in law stayed in the land of her birth but the other, Ruth, came with her saying, "For where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God will be my God!" Naomi and Ruth schemed so that Boaz would take Ruth as wife and thus they bore Obed, the father of Jesse the father of King David. Under him Israel was very strong as was the faith strengthened by the psalms.

But how we come to David's sin, David falling for Uriah's wife and if that were not bad enough arranging to have Uriah killed so his sin might be covered up. There came out of this the great



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penitential psalm: "Have mercy on me God in your kindness, in your compassion wash out my offence", the greatest of all acts of contrition. The child conceived whom they tried to cover up died but they had another: Solomon and in the end Jesus came from this line.

Thus Matthew is emphasising that Jesus came from a seedy sinful line and that God, in becoming man, embraced our human weakness and sinfulness and did not reject a line laden with embarrassing sin. As the Angel said to St. Joseph, "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son and you shall call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins". Jesus belonged to a line of sinners whom he would lift from the mess of their sins.

There is one other theme in this passage that is also never to be forgotten. That long line of people, whose names are mostly that, just names and awkward ones at that, are representative of those people who despite their sins and shortcomings, kept the faith alive. Maybe they felt inadequate, maybe they fell very short of their obligations, but they kept faith in promises that had been given and we owe them much.

And all of us who have received the faith are part of that family of God's people who are being entrusted by God, despite our sins and maybe even our dreadful betrayals and infidelities, to pass on the faith in a God who saves.

Yes let us all come before the crib this Christmas, like the poor shepherds, admitting our share in the morass of human nature. But let us cherish the sight we see, the closing of one chapter, the revealing of the Saviour who has come to save us from our sins, and let us partake of the next chapter, the proclamation with Mary of the Gospel of Joy: God united himself to us, he is on our side and with his great love and patience is lifting us from sin into the way of eternal life.

Happy Christmas to you all!

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill