

Christmas Day 2011

“Identity”

Matthew 1:1-17

The purpose of Matthews’s Gospel is to introduce Jesus as King to a Jewish audience. Here in Matthews’s genealogy Jesus is presented as the legal heir to the throne of David. Matthew begins in verse 1: “The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” His kinship to David, the king of Israel, is mentioned before that of Abraham, the father of Israel.

To help us better understand the purpose of the genealogy of Jesus; it is important to note that the Jews very carefully maintained accurate genealogical records. They did so primarily because of property rights in Israel which were linked to family heritage. When the Jews settled in the Promised Land, in Israel, the tribes were given portions of land as an inheritance. From that portion, families within each of the tribes were each given parcels of land. The land could then be farmed, developed, or sold. Then every 50 years a dispossessed family could lay claim to the parcel of land that their ancestors had received when it was originally distributed. But individuals who could not trace their family had no inheritance in Israel. They were treated as foreigners! {This is true even today}The all important question that 1st century Jews had on their mind was,” Whose son is he?”

It’s too bad they didn’t have ID’s like SS numbers or drivers licenses back then; it would have been so much easier. I have been at the DMV several times over the past couple of months and without out my ID nobody would believe who I was, who I am, or who I will be. And you better have some ID if you are pulled over by the police. Identification is everything! Matthew identifies Jesus as King in his genealogy.

Still not all the Jews accepted Jesus as King, or the babe born King of the Jews. Sometimes no matter what identification you might have, people may or may not accept you. Such was the case of Jesus’ birth. So many missed his birth, because the Jews had missed the promises that God had given them that identified who the person of Jesus is. God had made the promise to Adam: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring: He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” To Abraham God said, “I will surely bless you, and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations be blessed!” To Jacob

God said,” The scepter shall not depart from Judah, or the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him the obedience of all people.” Through the prophet Micah God said, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are so little among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is ruler of Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days.” Isaiah prophesied these words, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples- of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.” And finally to king David himself God said, “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his Kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever.”

ALL OF THESE GENELOGICAL PROPHISIES ARE FULFILLED IN JESUS AND ARE POINTED OUT IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL IDENTIFYING WHO THE BABE BORN IN BETHLEHEM IS! And yet so many missed it and so many continue to miss Jesus at Christmas even today. I suppose many identify Christmas with Santa Claus and presents we open on Christmas morning. People have identified my wife Sara as the Pastor’s wife and whatever else that role entails. But to me and to our children my wife Sara is so much more! I remember shortly after my wife began her medical practice in Yakima someone I didn’t know heard my last name and she looked at me and blurted out, “OHHH you must be the Doctor’s husband” and suddenly I understood the mixed feelings my wife felt when people simply saw her in the role of the Pastor’s wife.

All of us wear different hats at different times during or life. We can so easily lose our identity. I get so involved in being a pastor I forget that I also need to be a father to my 16 year old daughter and a husband to a woman who’s been with me over 33 years. Then there’s my most important identity, a baptized child of God. From the moment He was born Jesus knew who He was. He understood His mission, why He was on earth. He had been identified by the prophets, John the Baptist had even pointed to Him and exclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!” It’s also important for us to know that we have a purpose, we have a mission, and we have been identified by God as a Holy People! (Woman in Africa ILLUS.)