

Vigil of Christmas December 24

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Isaiah 62:1-5

As we look forward to the celebration of the birth of the Messiah and His arrival at the end of time, Isaiah looks forward to God breaking the silence of many years.

¹ For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, Until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch.

Zion's vindication comes with the suddenness of dawn over the desert: without trees to filter the light, it changes from dark to light very quickly. This hope always seemed close on the Feast of Tabernacles when lights were kindled "at the place of the water drawing" (Pool of Siloam) they were so bright that there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illumined by the light.

² Nations shall behold your vindication, and all kings your glory; You shall be called by a new name pronounced by the mouth of the LORD.

A new name is indicative of a change in destiny; destined for a new state of happiness and glory (Revelation 2:7; 3:12).

³ You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the LORD, a royal diadem held by your God.

This image refers back to the ancient practice of showing the local deity wearing a crown which was patterned after the city walls. A diadem is a crown worn as a sign of royalty. Yahweh holds this crown in His hands, and the crown is the new Jerusalem.

⁴ No more shall men call you "Forsaken," or your land "Desolate,"

When the covenant with Yahweh is violated, the curses are called down upon the people (Leviticus 26:21-22; 2 Chronicles 24:20).

But you shall be called "My Delight," and your land "Espoused."

The promises of Hosea 2:18-20 are not forgotten, even though Israel has had adulterous relationships with Baals.

For the LORD delights in you, and makes your land his spouse. ⁵ As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.

Adulterous Israel is restored to that joyful, innocent age of long ago when she was God's virgin spouse.

2nd Reading - Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

Our second reading comes from the account of Paul's first missionary journey, a journey which began in Antioch in Syria and now finds him in Antioch in Pisidia. It is the first of several speeches of Saint Paul to Jews proclaiming that the Christian Church is the logical development to Pharisaic Judaism (see also Acts 24:10-21; 26:2-23).

¹⁶ So Paul got up, motioned with his hand, and said, AFellow Israelites and you others who are God-fearing, listen.

These are Gentiles who came to the synagogue because they admired and wanted to learn more about Judaism; but they had not made a total Mosaic commitment (such as circumcision and following the dietary laws). This group of people were especially fertile subjects for Christian conversion.

¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and exalted the people during their sojourn in the land of Egypt. With uplifted arm he led them out of it.

The synagogue assembly is representative of the whole people of Israel.

²² Then he removed him and raised up David as their king; of him he testified, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will carry out my every wish.'

The saying "David, son of Jesse" combines Psalm 89:21 and 1 Samuel 13:14 (a prophet of Samuel).

²³ From this man's descendants God, according to his promise, has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus.

This ties Jesus to David and [Isaiah 11:1](#) and Nathan's oracle in [2 Samuel 7:16](#).

²⁴ John heralded his coming by proclaiming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel; ²⁵ and as John was completing his course, he would say, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. Behold, one is coming after me; I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals of his feet.'

According to Luke 16:16 this corresponds to the end of the law and the prophets, and the beginning of the good news of the kingdom.

Gospel Matthew 1:1-25

Having just heard in our second reading that Jesus is a descendent of David, Saint Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy from Abraham. This genealogy not only shows Jesus; human ancestry, it also indicates that salvation history has reached its climax with the birth of the Son of God through the working of the Holy Spirit.

For us, genealogy charts can be very dull and boring but for the Jews (and other Eastern peoples of nomadic origin) genealogical trees were of great importance because a person's identity was especially linked to family and tribe; the place of birth was of secondary importance. In the case of the Jews, there is the added religious significance of belonging by blood to the chosen people.

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

The history of the salvation of the chosen people begins with the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3: land, royal dynasty (name), and worldwide blessing. The first promise (land/nation) is upgraded to a covenant with Abram (Abraham) in Genesis 15 and is fulfilled in Moses.

² Abraham became the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

³ Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.

Tamar was a Canaanite woman who deceived her father-in-law (Judah) into having sexual relations with her. The result of this incestuous union were the twins Perez and Zerah (Genesis 38).

Perez became the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab became the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Rahab was a prostitute of Jericho, a non-Jew, who sheltered the spies sent to scout out the promised land (Joshua 2). She and her household were spared when the Israelites took the city.

Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.

Ruth was a Moabite woman, a foreigner, whose story is told in the book of Ruth.

**Obed became the father of Jesse,
6 Jesse the father of David the king.**

The second promise to Abram (name/royal dynasty/kingdom) is upgraded to a covenant in Genesis 17:1-19 and fulfilled in King David.

David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah.

Bathsheba is not named; but instead her position in the eyes of God is listed. Uriah was a Hittite and it is presumed that she was one also. She committed adultery with David, and when she became pregnant, David ordered Uriah into battle to be killed. The child of this adulterous relationship died and Solomon was conceived after David and Bathsheba married. These four foreign women, who in one way or another were bought into the history of Israel, are one sign, among many others, of God's design to save all mankind.

**7 Solomon became the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asaph.**

The successor of Abijah was not Asaph, but Asa (1 Chronicles 3:10). Matthew may have deliberately introduced Asaph (author of Psalms 73-83) to show fulfillment of the promises of all the Old Testament.

8 Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat was the son of Asa (1 Kings 15:24).

**Jehoshaphat the father of Joram,
Joram the father of Uzziah.**

**9 Uzziah became the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah.**

**10 Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amos,**

Some texts read "Amon". Amon, son of Manasseh, was installed as king while an infant according to 2 Kings 21:18ff. The rendering of Amos for Amon is believed to be the result of an early confusion of the name of King Amon with the name of the prophet Amos.

Amos the father of Josiah.

11 Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

The deportation to Babylon is described in 2 Kings 24-25. It fulfilled prophets warnings to the people of Israel and their kings that they would be punished for their infidelity to the commandments of the Law of God; especially the first commandment.

12 After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

13 Zerubbabel the father of Abiud.

Abiud became the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

14 Azor the father of Zadok.

Zadok became the father of Achim,

Achim the father of Eliud,

15 Eliud the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar became the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

16 Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.

This verse is carefully constructed to avoid saying that Jesus was the son of Joseph. Jewish genealogies followed the male line. Joseph, being Mary's husband, was the legal father of Jesus. The legal father is on a par with the biological father as regards rights and duties. It was quite common for people to marry within their clan, Mary may also have belonged to the House of David. Several early church fathers testify to this: St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenaeus, St. Justin and Tertullian, who base their testimony on an unbroken oral tradition.

17 Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Fourteen generations is, actually, 2 times 7 generations. There are a total of six "7s" from Abraham to Jesus. Jesus starts the 7th group, 7 being the number of the covenant. The third promise to Abram (worldwide blessing), made a covenant in Genesis 22 is fulfilled in the New Covenant instituted by Jesus.

18 Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. 19 Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

Espousal took place about one year before the marriage celebration. The marriage proper consisted, among other ceremonies, in the bride being brought solemnly and joyously to her husband's house (see Deuteronomy 20:7). From the moment of espousal onward, a certificate of divorce was required. Unchastity during this period was not adultery and the child was considered legitimate. Joseph, obviously, knew that he was not the father of this

child in the physical sense. No public reason was needed for the divorce but he could ask for a trial by ordeal (Numbers 5:11-31).

²⁰ Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, A Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.

The angel reminds Joseph by use of the title “son of David” of Nathan’s prophesy (2 Samuel 7:12).

For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. ²¹ She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Hebrew name for Jesus is Yeshua (Joshua). It means “Yahweh is salvation”.

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.”

The sacred author quotes Isaiah 7:14 in the Greek Septuagint form.

²⁴ When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. ²⁵ He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

The implication that he had relations “after” is not present in the Greek. The same word is used in John 9:18 where it says that the Pharisees did not believe in the man blind from birth until (*heos*) they called his parents. They didn’t believe afterward either.