

# From Generation to Generation: There's Room for Every Story

## First Sunday of Advent

Matthew 1:1-17    Isaiah 2:1-5  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Certainly you must be wondering why I haven't ever preached a sermon before using this amazingly exciting list of Jesus' genealogy! It goes all the way back to Abraham, covering about 2000 years of ancestral history. Well, no preacher I know would willingly choose this passage as the basis for a sermon. Rather, it was chosen by the team from the resource, **A Sanctified Art**. They have been creating Advent and Lenten worship series material for the past six years, many of which we have used here to guide us through our seasons of Advent and Lent.

Their usual procedure is to base their resource material on the assigned lectionary scripture readings for each Sunday. This year, however, they're trying something new and different, moving outside the lectionary to offer a clearer chronological storyline of the events leading up to and following Jesus' birth – the birth of Christ. They are particularly focusing in on all the humans involved in an attempt to tell the full scope of the Christmas story.

The overarching theme for this year's season of Advent is called **From Generation to Generation**. Hence, the reading of Jesus' genealogy from generation to generation. Concerning the theme, the creative team at A Sanctified Art explains:

The stories, scriptures, and traditions of the Christmas season have been passed down to us throughout the generations. Many of us enter this season with a swell of memories and emotions as vast as the cultural and religious rituals this holiday holds. Like a tapestry woven throughout time, the Christmas story weaves us in—to remember how God has shown up in the past, to continue the work of collective liberation, to behold the presence of God in flesh and bone.

As the team read through and studied the scriptures to select, a line from Mary's song of protest and praise, from Luke 1, often referred to as The Magnificat, gave them pause:

*Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is God's name.  
God's mercy is for those who revere God  
**from generation to generation.**  
(Luke 1: 48b-50)*

Despite the challenges and vulnerability she faced, Mary could glimpse the scale and scope of the good news she was part of bringing forth. This good news transcends time and space—it was and is bigger than just her. Christ is coming for collective liberation: God's redemption is at work for years to come. Therefore, the promise is meant to be lived out and passed on from generation to generation.

Throughout this Advent season, then, we are encouraged to pay attention to each of the characters in these familiar narratives and ask:

- What did each person pass on or contribute?
- How did they either participate in God's liberation and love—or try to thwart God's justice?
- What can we learn from them, and what is our role now?
- What will we pass on to the next generation?

By the way, the root word of "generation" is "gen" meaning "origin" or "birth." Therefore, "Our theme is also a call to action: **what are we being called to generate or bring forth?** What have your ancestors and those who have come before you passed on for you to continue? Who are the spiritual elders in your community who planted the seeds for the things that are now blooming? **What seeds are you planting for the future?** From Generation to Generation... reminds us of the ways our lives, histories, actions, and stories are interconnected and woven together. The work of God is always unfolding—in and through us."

My hope for you, and for all of us during this year's season of Advent is this: "may you remember that you belong—to a story etched into the wrinkles of time, to generations that have come before and will come after, to a love that won't let you go." To do this, it might help to remember those in your life who have come before you, planting in you seeds of faith. I've traced my own genealogy on ancestry.com and find it quite fascinating to go back hundreds and hundreds of years. Except for scant information about when and where they lived and died, and sometimes what they did for a living, there's almost no real stories of who they were as actual people who lived real lives. Part of me wishes I could get to know them and their stories. In part, to help figure out what was passed on from generation to generation that might add insight to who I am.

**Part of the legacy that each and every one of us pass on is the story of our lives. Those stories must be passed on to future generations so they don't get lost.**

Unfortunately, however, it doesn't take many generations, some researchers say only six, to have basically forgotten almost everything about that person's life. That would be your great-great-grandparents and before.

When it comes to the Bible, however, we have stories of several of the people listed in Jesus' genealogy. As the resource describes:

In that long list of names, we remember the trauma and triumph of those who came before; each name holds a story and their story gives way to Christ's story. God works through the unexpected people and stories of the past and present. When you zoom in, you may not be able to see how each character propels the

story forward, but when you zoom out, you can see how each story is woven together into a larger tapestry.

The Isaiah passage illustrates a convergence of opposing groups and identities coming together. Instead of the way of the past—of war—they learn a new way by transforming their weapons into gardening tools.

**What are the old paths that we've followed, and where must we diverge into a new way?**

That is the question on the mind of basically every church pastor, including myself. **What in our own community of faith's tradition of "doing and being" the church over the years needs to be reevaluated?** What paths that we have been on, sometimes simply on automatic pilot or sheer momentum, do we need to diverge from in order to find a new way forward? **Where is God regenerating a new path forward in the life and ministry of College Hill? What about in your own life?**

One more thing, I'm not going to get into the detailed explanations of why the genealogical list in Luke's gospel differs in many regards from Matthew's. Our resource material simply adds, "In some ways, the record of Jesus' family tree is like a tapestry of mismatched strings woven together. Theologically, how does the untidiness of Jesus' lineage emphasize how God grafts family in different and unexpected ways? How might this create **room for stories of blended families, families through adoption, or families who don't know their ancestry? How does this create room for your story?**"

Jesus' ancestry includes stories of trauma, triumph, hardship, and beauty. All of this complexity leads to Jesus's story. The same is true for each of us, our own ancestry is filled with trauma, triumph, hardship, and beauty. From generation to generation our own complex histories have led to our stories – your story, my story, College Hill's story.

**Know that there is indeed room in the kin-dom of God for every story.**

Amen.

Resource:  
A Sanctified Art, *From Generation to Generation...*, 2022.