

Rev. Cameron Barr
December 26, 2021

First Sunday of Christmas
Genesis 2:7-9; Matthew 1:1-16 from A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church

Don't let the Omicron blues distract us from the thrill of reading the genealogy of Jesus today. For weeks I've been reading over and rehearsing some of the most challenging lines so that I could accurately pronounce the names of Meshullemeth, Jehoiachin, and Zerubbable without stumbling and stammering in front of the congregation. Genealogies like these in scripture are famously unappreciated because they sound so boring. But they're also uninteresting because they are generally so concerned with the male line of ancestry. The Bible on your coffee table undoubtedly includes a genealogy of the fathers from Jesus back to Abraham. But as you might expect of the *Women's Lectionary*, Wilda Gafney presents to us a list of the mothers. "Sarah was the mother of Isaac, and Rebekah was the mother of Jacob, Leah was the mother of Judah." But what stands out most to me are the simple declarative statements about those whose memory is lost in history. "The name of Jehoram's mother is unknown." "After the deportation to Babylon, the names of the mothers go unrecorded." Lines like these are striking because they are so transparent and honest. The problem with so much of scripture is that the women are present, but their voices are unacknowledged. The narrator writes as if they weren't even there at all. But in this genealogy, each woman matters enough to bear mentioning even if we have no way of knowing her name. We know that Ahaz had a mother. And although we do not have access to her name, she is mentioned in this text. Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, and Salmon all had mothers. Although we do not know their names, they do not go unmentioned. The deportation to Babylon was a tremendous upheaval of Hebrew life and brought devastating losses to the community of Jerusalem. In exile there was no way to keep track of the women and their children and who belonged to who, but in this text we remember them even if we cannot remember their names. Their names are lost, but their existence is remembered. They are not invisible.

But it's not just patrilineal genealogies that invisibilize women in scripture. The problem actually starts in the second chapter of Genesis, the very origin story of humankind. The Hebrew text describes a human being created from the soil of the earth. Humanity coming from humus, the earth, the soil. There is nothing gendered about the human being first created by God. The Hebrew text is *ha adam*, including the article as if to describe a general object. It might as well be as ungendered as "the tree" or "the stone" as "the human being," and yet English translations usually make it a proper noun, Adam with a capital A. Gafney's translation, by contrast, presents the first human and the second human without subordinating one to the other by gender. "The Sovereign God built the side that had been taken from the human into a woman and brought her to the human," so that they are side by side and not one above the other. "This one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," says the human being in the Genesis narrative. On the day after

Christmas, then we are working backwards and forward throughout scripture drawing all of Creation from the margins of the world to the center of the story. Women and men. Children and elders. All people without regard to these binary categories, for as Paul has written “in Christ there is no East or West.” We read of the genealogy of Jesus backward to Jerusalem and to Sarah and Abraham. We read also from the book of Genesis forward from the first human to the incarnation of Christ. In the love of God revealed among us, the margins come to the center, the invisible become visible.

Around Christmas we always read from the prologue of John’s gospel, “In the beginning was the Word,” which reminds us of God’s presence throughout history and assures us of God’s presence with us now. Emmanuel means God with us. Forward and backward. From Sarah to Mary the Mother of Jesus. The gift of Christ Jesus means that by flesh and bone and blood we belong to God in every generation. All of us are held in God’s hand. All of us have a place to belong at Christ’s table.

My prayer in this season is that each one of us can see ourselves in the Christchild. Think about the nativity scene. The parents of Jesus gathered around the manger. Shepherds, angels, magi from afar. All gathered round to see the Christchild. That’s the love that God has for each one of us. All gather round. No one is invisible here. We all live with Christ at the center of God’s story.

Amen.