

**NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH**  
**EPIPHANY 1**  
**SUNDAY 12 JANUARY 2014**  
**Rev. Anneke Oppewal**  
**Luke 3: 21- 4:13**

**“The New Adam”**

Over the last two weeks, we've been looking at the genealogy of Jesus, as we encounter it in the first chapter of the gospel of Matthew. This week, we will look at the genealogy of Jesus, as we find it in the third chapter of the gospel of Luke. And we'll discover that they are two very different accounts of what went into “the making” of Jesus the Christ.

While reflecting on Jesus' roots, thoughts about our own roots are bound to surface. And I, for one, have been thinking quite a lot about my family tree in the last few weeks. What went into “my making”, what do I know about my own genealogy, and how important is it for who I am now?

There is not only the tracing back to personal and individual roots though. There are also our communal roots to consider when we reflect on where we come from. National roots, religious, spiritual, cultural, and denominational roots. They have all influenced who and what we are.

If we look at our community here at North Balwyn Uniting Church, we discover a rich history, and many different influences that have contributed to the unique mix of who we are now. St Aidan's, Trinity, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist, the three “official” streams that came into Union, with ex-Anglicans, Catholics and others added to the mix as well.

We may wonder what we, if we wanted to make a genealogy of the congregation, would put into it now. There are booklets available about the history of St. Aidan's, Trinity and the congregationalist congregation, which became part of our community as it is now. But I'm sure that since they were written, our perspective has changed, and putting them together would generate a different picture of the past than they each do individually now.

I imagine if we were to write a genealogy now, we would include the amalgamation of Trinity and St. Aidan's as a new milestone, as well as the selling of the Trinity properties as part of the Uniting Our Future process. But what else would we include? What anchor points, key names and key dates would emerge if we were to write a genealogy of our congregation now? And would it be different for different people, writing from different perspectives? I would think so.

Both Matthew and Luke write their own genealogy of Jesus, and they both write it from their own perspective, with their own bias, finding their own key names, dates and anchor points in Jesus' history to tell us what they figure went into “the making” of Jesus. As I've said before, at the time they were writing, genealogy was not so much about biology as it was about character development and roots. This is reflected in both these genealogies.

As we have seen, Matthew writes his genealogy forwards, from Abraham, through David, through Jesus, to the future. He shows there is a continued line of “begetting”, of offspring moving towards the reign of the true Davidic King, the Messiah, at the end of time.



Luke writes backwards, back from Jesus, all the way to Adam, and ultimately to God. He presents Jesus as Adam's twin, his mirror image, his historical counterpoint. I'll talk more about that a little bit later on in this sermon.

In Luke's genealogy, Jesus descends from another branch of the Davidic line than in Matthew's. Where Matthew has him connected back to the great King Solomon, Luke connects Jesus to a more obscure, other son of David's, by the name of Nathan. This fits in really well with Luke's focus.

Maria's 'Magnificat' at the beginning of the gospel sets the scene for that focus on the poor, the weak, the needy and the powerless in his gospel as she announces the program that Jesus' life is to follow: 'the powerful brought down from their thrones, and the lowly lifted up'. In the genealogy, Jesus is presented not as a descendant of a glorious line of kings and powerful rulers (as in Matthew), but as the descendant of the less powerful other son of David. On top of that, instead of kings travelling from afar to visit at Jesus' birth, with no mention of a stable, as in Matthew, in Luke, Jesus' birth takes place in a stable, with lowly shepherds watching over him.

There are more and different names in the genealogy of Luke than there are in Matthew's. With the genealogy consisting of 77 names in Luke, against 42 in Matthew. I won't go into the detail of all these names, but I would like to highlight two that are especially important.

As I said, in Matthew, Jesus descends from Nathan, the "other son" of David, and not from his half-brother Solomon. It makes Jesus a descendant of a less powerful and kingly branch of the Davidic tree. Another important difference in the names is the name of the father of Joseph, who in Matthew goes by the name of Jacob, but is called Eli in Luke.

As we've seen, one of Matthew's key themes is that he presents Jesus as the new King, who has come to establish his Kingdom amongst the nations, the world.

Luke has a different take on things. The two names that are so significantly and prominently different in his genealogy, Nathan and Eli, are connected with the prophetic and the priestly traditions of Israel. Nathan was the namesake of the prophet that kept King David on the straight and narrow (sometimes, in some writings, even confused with him), and Eli was the priest with whom Samuel was living in the temple, when he was called to be a prophet.

Jesus, in Luke's story, has not so much come to re-establish a kingdom, as he has come to take faith to a new place, and bring it, quite literally, home. It's not so much about re-instituting and reforming what has been, as it is a move away from that institution, to a broadening and widening of the understanding of how and where and by whom, God can be encountered.

Luke's gospel does not begin with the genealogy, like Matthew's; it begins in the temple, with Zachariah the priest, and the birth of John, the prophet, both very much representatives of the old order of things. Both, in their own way, descendants of a long line of priests and prophets, of Nathan's and Eli's in history. It moves then, and is structured around (I'll tell you about that some other time), the religious and spiritual move from temple to home, to house Churches; from Jewish faith practices in the gospel to a more general faith practice for all the nations in Acts. The new faith is inclusive, open and accessible for all, with worship and fellowship moving to open meal tables and communities that meet and worship at home.

At the end of Luke's two-part story, faith and God are no longer confined to the temple, or subject to the traditional boundaries around Jewish institutional religion. In the new Christian faith, prophets and priests can be called anywhere in the world. Their service is no longer confined to the temple or the synagogue, but takes place in the homes of friend- and family groups.

Access to God through the authority of temple and priest starts breaking down the minute that Zechariah the priest is dumbstruck by the angel's message about the birth of his son, and ending up, at the end of Acts, with Paul opening the way to God to anyone who will listen from a prison cell in Rome.

From the beginning of the gospel, heaven communicates directly with ordinary people, who are actually, extraordinary people in Luke. The stories about Jesus' birth and boyhood indicate that he, and people around him, are breaking the mould of the traditional religious order from the beginning.

God's word and future programme for this child are given to and heard from ordinary people, with Elizabeth, Mary, the shepherds, Simon and Anna receiving messages from angels and visions from above, and prophesying, in turn, about his life and future.

When Jesus visits the temple as a twelve year old, teaching roles are reversed, with the priests marvelling at the wisdom of this child, and Jesus referring to the temple as his father's house, rather than giving it the awe and reverence it should have inspired in a normal twelve year old at the time. The story brings the temple down a few notches, and puts it among other homes where Jesus will be preaching and teaching.

Where in Matthew's gospel we can recognise a structure that makes it possible to identify the whole gospel as being shaped along the lines of a traditional 'king's speech', announcing the king's identity and programme at the beginning of his reign, Luke sets out to show that God in Christ is at home anywhere in the world – in the temple, outside the temple, outside the traditional institutions of the Jewish faith, with ordinary people.

In Luke, the first four chapters of the gospel offer an introduction, before getting to the genealogy.

First, Jesus' programme, his context in the here and now, is set out with the stories about his birth. Then, at the beginning of his ministry, in baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on him. The Spirit hovering over the flood as in Genesis 1, indicating that here, once again, creation is starting all over again. A voice announces, and affirms, the message of the angels to Mary and the shepherds in the fields, that what we are dealing with here is no less than God's own son.

Only then does Luke come up with the genealogy; after the birth stories, after Jesus' baptism, when he is thirty years old. Luke is the only gospel writer who mentions Jesus' age, and that, again, is no coincidence. Thirty was the age at which priests were allowed to start service in the temple. It is only fitting that Jesus, priest and prophet of a new religious constellation, would, at that significant age, be anointed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit in a direct acknowledgement and confirmation from heaven. The genealogy then provides a pedigree, as before all new priests could serve, they needed to show to the temple authorities that their ancestry was pure, and worthy of their call.

It is likely that there is irony hidden in the way Luke presents Jesus with this pedigree. At the time, King Herod had trouble tracing his lineage back to anybody of substance at all, and apparently (according to Josephus) tried to destroy all the genealogical evidence in the temple archives to cover up this fact. What Luke says is that Jesus is proud NOT to be of the Solomonic line that Herod would have given everything to be able to trace himself back to. Instead, Jesus is proud to be a descendant of a much less important line, but nevertheless, still better connected than the mighty Herod. His genealogy also goes a lot further back than even David, which is an added bonus. This is because what is more important than providing Jesus with a long pedigree going back all the way to Adam, is the actual connection to Adam itself.

77 generations connect Jesus and Adam, that is  $7 \times 11$ , which, in biblical numerology is close to the number of the fullness of time, which is  $7 \times 12$ . In other words, with Jesus we are now only a "world week" away from the fullness of time. 11 "world weeks" have already passed, and, to speak in a more modern metaphor, with Jesus we have now come to five minutes to twelve.

In this man Jesus, the fullness of time has arrived, building God's home (with words from Revelations 22) among God's people. A new story is starting, a new Adam has appeared, a new creation is getting into swing.

The story immediately following the genealogy attests to this in another way. In this story, Jesus resists temptation, resists the devil, three times, reversing what happens with the first representatives of humanity in the Fall, in Genesis 4.

In Jesus, the clock is turned back (or fast forwarded) to before the Fall, back to the moment of "Adam", where humanity walked with God as God's children with nothing between them to divide or alienate.

So what does that mean for us, in the current context of our Church and culture? With the traditional structures, institutions and authorities collapsing around us, losing what has provided us with strength and security for generations?

For me, what I have realised, is that letting these genealogies, and their contexts, speak in the last three weeks, is that what we find in scripture is not a static faith, but a journey that is in perpetual flux – with many upheavals, diversions, mistakes, dead ends and new beginnings. Where the journey of our community may have started with Jesus, the making of Jesus, the journey of God with humanity goes back a lot further. A journey that continued with the apostles, Paul and others following in Jesus' footsteps until the present day.

Luke and Matthew both indicate, through their different genealogies, that the past is only important in as far as it pre-figures, and prepares for, God's future. A Kingdom needs to be built, and shaped according to what Jesus lived and died for. Homes need to be found for the gospel, where the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth will bring what Mary sings about in her Magnificat: The proud scattered, the powerful brought down, the lowly lifted up and the hungry filled with good things.

Luke, in particular, made me realise that the move away from the institutional Church and traditional organised religion is inherent to our faith and as old as Christianity itself. It started before Jesus was born and continues to the present day. It was one of the main themes of the reformation and other religious revivals over the centuries. It was even at the root of the building of large numbers of suburban churches after the war. It brings God close to home, in an open faith, of people gathering wherever there is a table to gather around, worshipping and practicing their faith.

That's what our faith is about. Living the program Mary set out in her Magnificat and that Jesus lived and died for, creating spaces for God to come close and ensuring that access to the divine is made accessible to all.

The way that will take shape will always be changing, right until all of creation has let itself be taken back to before the Fall, to where God lives among his people, creation renewed, with Christ as priest and prophet leading his people home, the new Adam. Amen.