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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Advent Midweek Service #1  
Wednesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**Sermon:** Bad Girls Begat Jesus: Tamar

**Texts:** Genesis 38; Matthew 1:1-6a

Focus Statement: God used sinful women to give birth to Jesus and his ancestors.

Function Statement: That they would rejoice in God's amazing grace to sinners like us.

Sermon Structure: Text-Application

Doctrinal Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person..." (SC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew

1:1, ESV).<sup>1</sup> So begins Matthew's Gospel—and the Christmas story. I know that when most

people think of the Christmas story, their imagination conjures up images of angels and

shepherds, three wise men, and the baby Jesus lying in a manger. But it all began much earlier

than that. In the Gospel according to Matthew, we read the genealogy of Jesus. We do a little

digging around the roots of his family tree in order to discover what kind of a Savior God would

send. After all, you can learn a lot about you who you are by exploring your roots.

Genealogy is increasingly popular in our country, no doubt because of how much easier it

has become through the Internet. In the old days, genealogy was a bit of an adventure. Like

Indiana Jones or Lara Croft, you had to comb through the old, dusty archives of churches and

county courthouses for birth, marriage, death, and baptismal records. You probably had to

explore a few cemeteries, taking photographs or rubbings of the grave stones in order to connect

some of your ancestors. Now thanks to the vast databases of the Latter Day Saints and websites

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

like ancestry.com, you can do most of your research online from the comfort of your favorite easy chair.

Genealogy allows us to discover who we are by looking back at where we came from. Sometimes when people research their family trees, they make interesting finds, discovering that they have royal blood or are distantly related to a U.S. president. Some find that their ancestors were war heroes or lived through significant events in world history. Others discover more nefarious types: murderers, horse thieves, or other kinds of ne'er do wells. I, for one, was proud to discover that 7 of my 8 great-great-great-grandfathers on my dad's side fought in the Civil War for the Union side (the only reason the eighth did not was because he hadn't emigrated from Scotland yet).

A few months ago, Lisa and I both took a big leap into our ancestry when we decided to submit our DNA to figure out our ethnic breakdown. We ordered these little kits from a company called 23 and Me. All we had to do was spit into a test tube and send our vial of saliva to a laboratory through the mail. After a few weeks, we got back our results. Like many Americans, I'm a European mutt: I'm 28% British and Irish, 22% French and German, 13% Scandinavian (from my mother's side), and 35% "Broadly Northwestern European" (whatever that means!). There's just a sliver of Spanish and Portuguese blood in me (less than 1%), so perhaps I should have studied German or French instead of Spanish during high school!

The reason I tell you all of this is because despite our own cultural and personal fascination with genealogy, those tend to be the parts of the Bible we skip right over. How many of us want to read a list of funny names that are difficult to pronounce? "So-and-so begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so..." But we need to remind ourselves that the genealogies in the Bible are there for a reason. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). That means that the genealogies are just as divinely inspired as the Ten Commandments and John 3:16. In other words, don’t skip them!

Genealogies had all kinds of purposes in the ancient world. Sometimes they were used as deeds for land or inherited property. At other times they were used to trace royal pedigree and claim to the throne. In the Bible, genealogies often trace the promises that God made to Abraham and the other patriarchs to their descendants. Some of those factors impact Jesus’ family tree too. But there is something truly surprising about the genealogy of Jesus: the inclusion of women.

Nowadays you cannot talk about your roots without including your mother’s or grandmother’s side of the family. But in the ancient world, women were held of little or no account in legal matters. Usually only men were included in genealogies of important people. The only time that a woman *might* be mentioned would be if she were a person of significant power, wealth, or importance. Yet Jesus’ genealogy includes *five* women! *Five!* And what makes their mention even more remarkable is that they were all scandalous women: Tamar, who pretended to be a prostitute in order to seduce her father-in-law; Rahab, who was an actual prostitute; Ruth, a Moabite woman from one of the nations the Jews were forbidden to marry; Bathsheba, an adulteress, whose sin was so great that her name isn’t even listed (she’s simply called “the wife of Uriah”). And then there is the virgin Mary, who even though she was a young girl of great virtue, was nevertheless a pregnant teenager—an offense that almost caused her fiancée Joseph to divorce her. To put it quite bluntly, in the words of Martin Luther, “there were no savory women” in Jesus’ genealogy.<sup>2</sup> To be fair, many of the men were worse. Even

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *The Martin Luther Christmas Book*, trans. and ed. Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 19.

Judah attested that Tamar was “more righteous” than he in our Old Testament lesson (Gen. 38:26). But the men already dominate many of our Bible stories and sermons. It’s time for the women to have their due.

My sermon series for this Advent is titled “Bad Girls Begat Jesus.” The word *begat* comes from the old King James Version of the genealogy: “Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat...” so on and so forth. The scandalous women of Jesus’ genealogy—the so-called “bad girls”—were included for a reason, and we’re going to find out what their stories reveal to us about the grace of God and the mission of our Messiah.

From the start, I would like to suggest there is great comfort in the inclusion of these women in Jesus’ family tree. For after all, if the Savior of the world came from such stock as prostitutes, idolaters, adulterers, and such, then none of us need to be ashamed of our own ancestry. No matter how dark your family’s past might be, there is still light at the end of the tunnel. We don’t have to be embarrassed about the sins of our parents or grandparents because they don’t ultimately define who we are. Instead, God’s amazing grace and powerful purposes at work in our lives determine our course. As God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel, “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father...” (Ezek. 18:20). Nor shall a son or daughter die for the sins of their mother either.

The other wonderful thing that we learn from the women in Jesus’ genealogy is the great reversal that God can bring about in people’s lives. No matter how great their sin or how desperate their circumstances, God was able to work through the bad to bring about incredible turn-arounds in the lives of these women. As the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8, “We know that for those who love God all things work together *for good*, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Every single one of the women in Jesus’ genealogy had a part to

play in his plan for our salvation. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary did a lot more than just donate DNA for Jesus. God used them for his glory, to give us hope, and to pave the way for Christ. For, in the end, God doesn't love us because of who we are or what we've done or haven't done in life. God loves us because of who *he* is and because of what Jesus did for us: dying on the cross and rising again to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. And that's what our sermon series is all about. So what if bad girls really did beget Jesus? To that we answer: God be praised! In the name of Jesus, Amen.