



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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BAPTISM OF THE LORD SUNDAY

So, You Think You Don't Matter?  
Acts 8: 14-17; Luke 3:15-16, 21-38

If you have ever attempted reading the Bible from cover to cover, if you are like most people, you skipped over the “begats.” You know the begats—those endless lists of who lived how long and was the father of whom that litter the pages of Genesis and I Chronicles in particular. We primarily think about the Old Testament when we think about the begats, but the New Testament has its own versions in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. Luke doesn't actually use the term “begat” (although Matthew does—in the King James Version), but the effect is the same. Listen to Luke's story:

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Heli, son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Melchi, son of Jannai, son of Joseph, son of Mattathias, son of Amos, son of Nahum, son of Esli, son of Naggai, son of Maath, son of Mattathias, son of Semein, son of Josech, son of Joda, son of Joanan, son of Rhesa, son of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, son of Neri, son of Melchi, son of Addi, son of Cosam, son of Elmadam, son of Er, son of Joshua, son of Eliezer, son of Jorim, son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Simeon, son of Judah, son of Joseph, son of Jonam, son of Eliakim, son of Melea, son of Menna, son of Mattatha, son of Nathan, son of David, son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz,

son of Sala, son of Nahshon, son of Amminadab, son of Admin, son of Arni, son of Hezron, son of Perez, son of Judah, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, son of Terah, son of Nahor, son of Serug, son of Reu, son of Peleg, son of Eber, son of Shelah, son of Cainan, son of Arphaxad, son of Shem, son of Noah, son of Lamech, son of Methuselah, son of Enoch, son of Jared, son of Mahalaleel, son of Cainan, son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.

Luke 3:15-16, 21-38

The begats get a little boring, don't they? The names are hard to pronounce and we don't know anything about most of these people other than that they are ancestors of Jesus. Delving into the names on Jesus' family tree is a bit like attending a family reunion for the first time: we don't know any of these people and we're not really sure we want to!

A curious person will wonder, however, why those lists are in the Bible in the first place. Why not just stick them in an appendix so people with nothing better to do can find them but the rest of us won't be bothered? To think that way, however, is to miss the point of the Bible as a whole. Certainly there are portions of the Bible that cause us to wonder why they are there. But the editors of scripture were wise and included and placed the texts for important reasons. The reason the begats are not stuck in the back of the Bible is that they are an integral part of the story. These lists tell stories. They paint pictures. They give clues. They draw implications. They tell us things that none of the other stories do!

For instance, in his gospel, Luke begins with Jesus and traces his genealogy backward, making certain that he crosses paths with King David along the way. The list reveals something significant, however. Luke tells us that Jesus is related to King David through his son Nathan and not his son Solomon. That means that Luke did not understand Jesus as having descended through the royal line of David; rather, he descended from the common side of the family. In other words, Jesus was not royalty in human terms. He was of the common folk. He was a part of all people, a point that is also made earlier in Luke's version of Jesus' baptism. Luke continues to trace Jesus' lineage back to Abraham and even further back to Adam and ultimately to God, the father of us all.

Matthew also has a story to tell. His story begins, not with Jesus, but with Abraham, the father of the faith. Matthew begins the family tree with its

roots deeply planted in the Land of Promise and sprouting tall and broad until the promise is fulfilled in Jesus. He, too, makes certain that the line runs through King David, but Matthew does trace Jesus' lineage through Solomon thus emphasizing Jesus' royal heritage. While Luke deals only with male ancestors, Matthew includes the names of four women—four very interesting women. Tamar, an Aramean, seduced her father-in-law Judah in order to have children in the family since her husband had been killed. Rahab, a resident of Jericho, helped the Israelite spies as they plotted to overthrow the city. Ruth, a Moabite woman, followed her mother-in-law Naomi back to Israel and persuaded their kinsman Boaz to do his duty and marry her. Bathsheba, the Hittite widow of Uriah, became the mother of Solomon by King David. Including these women in the genealogy emphasized not only the importance of women in Jewish families but made clear the ties Jews have with non-Jewish people, a point Jesus' made clear through his ministry. We see, then, that the “begats” can reveal some startling facts!

When we read Luke's account of the genealogy of Jesus, there are a few names we recognize immediately. We certainly know who Joseph was but we have to skip quite a few unfamiliar names before we arrive at Terah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We skip a few more names going down the tree and we find Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, and Shem. Skipping a few more unfamiliar names, we find Seth, Adam, and, of course, God. Surprisingly, we know nothing about the majority of names in Luke's list other than the fact that they are ancestors of Jesus. No other records of them can be found.

Why are those obscure names included? What do they mean for us? Could it be that the Israelites were poor record keepers and failed to write down the stories of Jesus' ancestral family? That is hardly true because it is obvious that the Jews kept good, detailed records as preserved in the Bible. A great deal of what we know about ancient Israelite history emerges from scripture itself.

Could these lists simply reveal to us that Jesus descended from a long line of nobodys? I hardly think that is the case since a more impressive list of names could have been inserted into the genealogy and no one would have been the wiser. No, these names are included for a reason. I think the story behind the genealogy is that every person in the list is significant as a link between what has been and what is about to be. Each one of the people named played a critical role between what God has done in the past and what God is about to do in the present. Matthew and Luke took pains to

demonstrate Jesus' significance as an heir of David, as the son of God, and as Messiah of all people. Each of the persons in his family tree played an important role in the ancestry of Jesus and his place in the story of the Jewish people.

Why, then, do you suppose that Luke waited until after the story of Jesus' birth, after the story of his experience conversing with the priests and rabbis in the temple when he was twelve, and after he was baptized when he assumed his ministry at the age of thirty to tell us his lineage? If this information is so important, why not include it at the beginning of the gospel as Matthew does?

Again, I think Luke is making a point by listing Jesus' family heritage after the story of his baptism. There is a connection between our baptism, the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and our lineage of faith in God. Luke tells us that when all the people were baptized, including Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and a voice announced God's blessing on Jesus. Earlier John the Baptist had told the people that he could baptize them with water but that one was coming who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). Upon Jesus' baptism, God affirmed Jesus as his son. He claimed him in the family of faith.

For every believer since Jesus, baptism is our entry into the family of faith. It is our way of saying to the world that we accept God as our Heavenly Parent. God's Spirit then affirms God's blessing and welcome to us. This blessing comes in a variety of experiences. You will remember that after Jesus' ascension into heaven following his resurrection, the disciples were blessed by the Spirit who appeared as "tongues of fire." Later, as the Gospel was spread to Samaria and more people believed, the Spirit blessed them through the ministry of Peter and John (Acts 8:14-17). For most of us, the Spirit of God visits us with an awareness of God's presence and an assurance of God's eternal love.

The two stories of Jesus' baptism and his genealogy remind us of where we fit into the story of Jesus. Baptism is how we find our way onto the family tree of faith. If we were to trace the way in which we came to be a part of the family of God, we would point to parents, a teacher, a minister, a friend, an evangelist, or some other person who had a direct impact on our claiming our Christian faith. We would then trace that person's faith story in the same way, and the person before them, and the person before them. In that way, everyone of us can follow the path of our faith back to Jesus because it is

from Jesus to the disciples and to everyone who became a disciple through them that our faith originates. In the same way, anyone who will become a believer in the future will do so because of someone alive now who is a follower of Christ. One of the startling truths about our faith is that it is always one generation away from extinction. If we fail to share the faith with others, no one will take up the faith and continue the family of God.

Baptism puts us in the family tree, so to speak. So all of those names that we find are the limbs and branches supporting Jesus support us as well. His physical ancestors become our spiritual ancestors when we claim him as our Lord. The genealogy of Jesus remind us that no matter who we are or what we have done or will do in life, we belong. We belong to God.

The other important part of this story is that when Jesus was baptized and the Spirit descended upon him, his immediate response was to get up and get going. The Gospels tell us that Jesus went immediately into the wilderness to prepare himself for ministry and then began teaching and preaching throughout Galilee. When the disciples were hiding out in that upper room after Jesus' death, the Spirit descended upon them, appearing as flames of fire, and the immediate response of those gathered was to rush into the streets telling the Good News of Jesus Christ to other people—in their own languages. When Peter and John ministered to the new believers in Samaria, they experienced the Spirit of God and began to share the Gospel in many ways.

The message of Luke's story is simple. We are a part of the family of God. Our baptism confirms our acceptance into that family and the Spirit of God affirms God's claim on our lives. The only reasonable response, therefore, is to rise up and follow. We emerge from the waters of baptism empowered to share the Gospel in word and in deed, further signaling to other people that we are children of God.

What then should our response be? If our baptism indicates our commitment, then the Spirit of God visits us. Should we not, like all the other followers throughout history, respond immediately? Should we not rush out and change our lives so that they reflect this change?

Sometime later today or this week, ponder the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick's great hymn which the choir sang earlier:

God of grace and God of glory, On Thy people pour Thy power.  
Crown Thine ancient church's story, Bring her bud to glorious flower.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, For the facing of this hour,  
For the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil 'round us, Scorn Thy Christ, assail His ways.  
From the fears that long have bound us, Free our hearts to faith and praise.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, For the living of these days,  
For the living of these days.

Cure Thy children's warring madness, Bend our pride to Thy control.  
Shame our wanton selfish gladness, Rich in things and poor in soul.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, Lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal,  
Lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal.

Set our feet on lofty places, Gird our lives that they may be,  
Armored with all Christ-like graces, In the fight to set men free.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, That we fail not man nor Thee,  
That we fail not man nor Thee.

Save us from weak resignation, To the evils we deplore.  
Let the search for Thy salvation, Be our glory evermore.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, Serving Thee whom we adore,  
Serving Thee whom we adore.<sup>1</sup>

Fosdick, the Pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, wrote this hymn in 1930 when the country was in the midst of the worst economic depression in history. The world was still reeling from war and unsettled in many places. It was a time of tension and anxiety on many fronts. Fosdick knew that inclusion in God's family meant assuming an active role in the family business. Wisdom and courage are granted from God to see our way through the various trials and temptations of life and to make a positive difference in this world. We immerse ourselves in the waters of baptism and in the love and grace of God, and we emerge to minister in God's name as we share the Gospel with everyone whom we encounter.

We are a part of the family of God. Our faith is descended from Christ himself. Our response should be joy and gratitude lived out in active discipleship through the Church and in the world. You are the children of God. Go live out your faith! Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, "God of Grace and God of Glory," 1930.

January 13, 2013

Prayer of Thanks giving and Intercession

God of the circling years, whose faithfulness spans generations, your grace and mercy continually astound us. Through Christ you have entered our world, walked where we walk, shared our limitations, been touched by our joys and sorrows. We are grateful that we need hide nothing from you because you know our longings and desires, our fears and temptations. Your goodness to us is beyond our comprehension or our deserving. For every gift which comes from your gracious hand, O Lord, we offer our thanks and praise.

God of this very moment, you are present everywhere: in crisp, beautiful mornings which sing of your creativity, in the loving faces of family and friends, in the words and music which stir our souls, in our prayerful solitude. Make yourself known to us as we seek to follow you. Help us to move beyond the convenient boundaries of our lives to touch the lives of others. Teach us your perfect will and guide us in the path of righteousness. Speak peace to our restless minds, so that your ways become our ways and Christ's call our fervent desire.

God of every day that is to come, grant that we may live, move and have our being in constant awareness of your grace and blessing. Wherever we find suffering, empower us to bring healing. Whenever we encounter need, move us to respond with compassion and generosity. Whoever must live in the threat of violence, to them, enable us to speak a word of peace. Whatever we see or hear that diminishes the dignity of another, grant us the courage to work toward the reality of your justice and hope. As we travel the journey of the days you have given to us, guide our footsteps that they may follow those of Christ and so fill us with your Spirit that your love and mercy will be evident in us and through us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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