

Genealogies are ordinarily expected to give information about ancestry. We trace our family trees to find out how various bloodlines intermingle and have finally come to reside in oneself – or whoever. But this is not the prime purpose, perhaps, of either Matthew’s genealogy or Luke’s. They are, rather, placing Jesus and Mary within the history of Israel, in Matthew’s case, and within this and the wider history of humanity in the case of Luke, the one tracing its history back to Abraham and the other back to Adam. Bloodlines, of course, matter or we wouldn’t be here to argue the case but, here, history matters more, or, in the words of Marilynne Robinson

*Rather than arguing for an unbroken ancestral line,
the writer punctuates the series by drawing attention
to its signal moments, including the exile, which would
be extraneous if the point were to document ancestry,
but which is very relevant indeed if the point is to present
Jesus as the next defining act of God toward Israel.*

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This is, of course, where Mary comes into the picture – and Rahab and Tamar and Ruth and Bathsheba. It’s not their bloodline that matters – two are Canaanites, one a Moabite, and the last the wife of Uriah the Hittite – but their place in the history of Israel. Indeed, we know nothing of Mary’s ancestry from the biblical texts themselves. What is important is rather the act of faith she makes in becoming the mother of Jesus who, much later, will be seen to have been of ultimate significance for Israel. If God can raise up children of Abraham from stones, God can raise children from Rahab and Tamar and Ruth and Bathsheba and Mary so that our salvation may be complete. And so we celebrate Mary. If God is with us, all things are possible.

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