

Woven into the Story

December 17, 2020

St Augustine said:

THE NEW TESTAMENT LIES HIDDEN IN THE OLD AND THE OLD TESTAMENT IS UNVEILED IN THE NEW.

Today's readings realize this in an explicit way. From Genesis we heard an excerpt from chapter 49 where Israel blesses his 12 sons. He highlights the future role Judah will play as the central tribe of the emerging nation. For Judah will become the seat of Israel's political and religious life – Jerusalem is in the territory of Judah. In Revelation chapter 5 St John has a vision of Jesus and the first designation the angel uses to describe him is:

See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered¹

When we look at today's text from Genesis we have an embryonic statement that will find its full expression in Jesus - for indeed here the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and this text will be unveiled by the birth of the Saviour. For Israel prophecies that the tribe of Judah is destined to be the royal tribe in Israel. He is depicted both as a lion, sated with prey, and as a king, ruling over other nations with scepter in hand².

Now with this in mind listen to this most famous verse from Luke 2:

All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.³

Here we read the fulfillment of the words that 2 millennia earlier had been spoken to Judah by his father Israel. Now Matthew in today's Gospel, with literary genius, also describes how Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Israel to Judah. Remarkably the genealogy is divided into three groups of 14 names. In Jewish tradition every name had a numerical association. The name David is associated with the number 14. And here is the most amazing thing. Jesus is known a prophet, priest and king. All of the names in the first list of 14, highlight in a particular way people who will foreshadow Jesus in a prophetic way. All of the people listed in the second series were kings of Israel and all listed in the third series were related to priestly vocations.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Re 5:5). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

² Hahn, S., & Mitch, C. (2010). [*Genesis: With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes*](#). (Revised Standard Version and Second Catholic Edition, Eds.) (p. 78). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 2:3–4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

Therefore Matthew is showing by listing all these names those who participate in the unfolding of the words spoken by Israel to Judah in Genesis 49.

Listen again to how the genealogy ends: ¹⁶” and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.”⁴ Up until this point in the story the formula had been “so and so was the father of so and so”. But not at its climax where we would expect to hear Joseph was the father of Jesus. Rather we are told he is the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born – the Messiah. The whole of this story comes to fulfillment in the “yes” of a teenage Jewish girl in response to the Angel Gabriel so that from her God could fulfill his purposes spoken first through Israel centuries earlier.

We too are part of this same story and each of our names plays a key role in the unfolding of God’s purposes. Our lives are not random and without meaning. Rather like the eighteen colours of wool that were used to make my favorite sweater our names are woven into God’s great story, one that we love so much that we hear it again and again, year after year.

I invite you to pause today and consider how your name and life are of great significance and matter to Jesus and is being woven into the story of God’s great and saving love.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 1:16). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.