

The Family Tree
Micah 5:2
Pastor Levi Lusko

Micah is a significant prophecy about Christmas, especially about the town of Bethlehem.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans^[a] of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.” NIV

Bethlehem: The runt of the litter. The Trip Advisor review was no different. I went to this city. Bethlehem is one of the least impressive cities to visit.

From you will come=He'll be a ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.

His family tree is ancient and distinguished.

The Family Tree

Every family has conditions concerning their Christmas tree.

How do we select the perfect tree?

In my book we should not be playing Christmas carols early. After Halloween is too soon.

Every family has different ways of selecting trees.

Some are hard-core. Waste-deep in the snow, hypothermia, they chop down their own. They will walk past the tree-“The glory of God resting upon it.” They say, “I want a tree that I can kill.” Barbarians! Making a family of squirrels homeless, like Clark Griswold in Christmas.

They want a live tree. Fake tree, is fake Christmas in their eyes.

Others don't mind the death of the tree. It's like they want to eat the burger, but they don't want to meet the cow. “I will outsource the chopping of the tree. I go the tree lot. I buy the tree. I want to shop the tree aisle.”

Uber recently announced to Montana they will deliver trees to all of the popular cities of Montana. Every city....Uber will bring you a Christmas tree...except ours.

The third category of Christmas tree shoppers is the laziest. They go to the garage. They pull out their pre-lit, artificial tree. My family does the ornaments, I am

supposed to light the tree. When I found out, snapping three pieces, my lighting is done. I have the smell covered. I have pine-scented ornaments---wilderness with no fuss.

We all have different traditions. Once the star is on top? Are you star or angel, no star? au natural? Do you leave the top alone? As a family, we will sit down with our loved ones with mugs of hot chocolate. We listen to Bing Crosby, or Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Alvin and the Chipmunks (I have a lot of little kids.)

Then we read the Christmas story. Surely, Mary and Joseph had a perfect tree. We are talking about the manger scene. So beautiful, charming and rustic!

Christmas looks better from a distance.

No one at the first Christmas thought how charming the birth of Christ was. The wise men ran to escape from murderous Herod when he went on his "killing babies" spree. Angels are warning Joseph to escape to Egypt to safety. Joseph was going to put Mary away because of her pregnancy. People can do the math. When they ask Joseph, he said the baby wasn't his. Virgin-born? So what did they think? Oh, you know -Jose can you see? He's the pool cleaner, the mailman. Even as a full-grown man, Jesus heard the words "...at least we know who our Daddy is." That followed Jesus, Mary, Joseph throughout their lives. Christmas looks good on nativity sets.

When we come to tell the story, Luke 2, Matt 2, we assume that's the whole story.

Where Christmas begins is in Matthew 1, "...This is the genealogy of Jesus. It's His family tree.

Perhaps you try to read the Bible in a year. Did someone print the phone book? The beginning of the Christmas story starts like this. Matthew 1:17:

"Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah."

14 generations...a list in succession.

This is Jesus' family tree-His bloodline. Generation after generation. Why would we need to know about that? My wife Jenny can trace her family back to the Mayflower. We could get into so many places when she plops her "mayflower card" down. My mother-in-law can trace her family line. Lusko is a Czechoslovakian name. My book was just translated into the language. The readers cry, "That's our boy! I'll buy this book." Ancestry.com. Amazing. I think I'm a mutt. Mom thinks I'm a little bit Native American.

In Jesus' day ancestry was a really big deal.

Your blood line in Jesus' day was key. Your resume. Your portfolio. It would open doors for you. A good job. It would cause the right conversation. In Knight's Tale-a fake nobility was created for Heath Ledger's character to compete in the joust. Your ancestry could qualify you or disqualify you from certain things.

Especially in the case of Jesus. Messiah is the Superman of the Bible who will save the world. He rules forever.

Messiah is the cure for everything. Like how you fix the Mario game. You take out the Mario cartridge, blow on it, and you put it back in. Mario runs, saves the Princess at the end. Jesus saves the world, no more glitches, no more sin, no more cancer, no more crime, no more disease, no more death. The former things will have passed away.

That's what being Messiah is all about.

There were 700 prophecies in the Old Testament that had to be true to prove Jesus was Messiah. Christ had to be from Bethlehem, Messiah had to prove to be related to David. If he weren't, the Jews would say, "You are the weakest link!"

Genealogy is key. Matthew doesn't just go back to David, Matthew goes back Abraham. Look at Jesus' family tree. Luke 3 does the whole family tree too. In a Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, Lion King, Simba has the right to keep the hyenas out of life because his father was Mufasa. (Forgive me, I have a lot of kids in my house!)

That is where the stuff in the family tree of Jesus stops making sense.

What doesn't make sense is everything else in Jesus' family tree. Matthew only had to prove Jesus was from the line of David. The branches in his tree are twisted. He flaunts that. Not only was a family tree like a resume, but was curated as creatively as one in our day. All of us have parts on our resume we don't want a new boss to see. That one job you stormed out, no show, no call, no hire. We put our best foot forward. Some people will leave things out in the resume. What about the interim? Where are the blanks? Did you work in a relief organization? In genealogy in that day, you put your best foot forward.

Herod struck people from his resume so people would think of him in one way. Not Jesus.

Verse 5-Rahab makes it into the family tree. Why is that peculiar? She is a woman-no one in the ancient world would ever include a woman. Jesus came into a world to change the paradigm. No more degrading women. No difference between Jew and Gentile, slave or free. Rahab was not only a woman, but she was a prostitute. Rahab is introduced to us in the book of Joshua as "Rahab the harlot." If you were writing

the resume that day, you would never include prostitution. "Yeah, my Great-Grandma...people paid her to have sex. Business was booming. She was hot."

We get to the mention of Judah and Tamar. Perez and Zerah. This is a scandal that you would want to watch on Netflix. Judah was Tamar's father-in-law. In his defense, he thought she was a prostitute. Why would you talk about that? Such scandal!

Just talk about David. Now, we get to David. The father of Solomon, you have to be related to him to get to the throne. Whose mother had been....Uriah's wife. Why would you include such indiscretion? How did Solomon come into the world? David and Bathsheba-"who had been the wife of Uriah." Why do we have this sordid triangle? Adultery-David had an affair with Bathsheba, height of success in Israel's history. Let's get to Uriah, murder-Merry Christmas. The Man after God's own heart. Failed not only because he had sex with Bathsheba, but murdered her husband Uriah-one of David's bodyguards. Uriah was on the battlefield risking his life-one of David's mighty men-and David should have been fighting alongside of him. Instead, David was sleeping with his wife. He has Uriah sent into battle to be killed.

Jesus' family had prostitution, scandal, murder, and at the top of the tree, idolatry. We have mentioned two people groups who weren't even Jews. Ruth, a Moabite and a Canaanite, Rahab, who lived in Jericho-sworn, mortal enemies of the Jews. Matthew's mentioning He's not pure-blooded. No Jew would run that up the flagpole. Remember, humanity is lost because of the tree. The tree that sat in the middle of the Garden early on in the Bible.

CNN reported a woman in Australia who had a fake Christmas tree like mine and came down the stairs to admire the tree, have a quiet cup of coffee. Keep it quiet as long as possible before the kids get up! She was appreciate tree and ornaments. She drew close to the tree and the ornaments, and took a picture of the tree-it's been shown all over social media. Ornament, ornament, serpent. It was a Tiger snake, one of the most dangerous snakes in Australia.

What does that remind you of? Genesis 3:4,

"⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Eve deceived. Adam not fooled. On the spot, they died. Hold on a second, I thought they lived many more years! Hold on a second, there is more than one way to die. There is a spiritual death and physical death.

Adrian Rogers, in his book, *Kingdom Authority* said, "Adam was very much like a Christmas tree cut off from its roots, brought into the house and decorated, In some

ways, it may look better in the house than in the wild. But what happened when it was cut from the source of life will show sometime after New Year's. The truth of the matter is that it was often called a living tree, but it was dead when it was cut off from the source of life. And so it is with man."

We were separated from God by sin. And sin brings death in that definition, disconnecting from God's life, from God's light. A great gulf exists between us that we could not cross. That's why Adam and Eve had to be banished from the Garden and we've been trying to get back ever since.

Now they began to die. Not immediately, just like the Christmas tree in the living room. There is this longing in us, this groaning for the things that don't satisfy. "I'll get a pile of money together. I'll get this nice car. I've got this job, the hot girl. I got my body in shape." But there is still this longing, this loneliness, this sense that the world is not enough. "I've got the PhD, the ADD, the DVD, I'm still searching, still looking" ...that's because the Bible says we were created to know God. And disconnected from Him, there will always be something missing.

Here's the problem. We are dead spiritually. But we are dying physically. That's what's true of all of us. We have different styles of clothing, music, hobbies. Some like rock, rap, and some like house music-and others of us like country...we will pray for you.

All of us are on a process that's going to lead us to a grave. Could be cancer, could be a car accident, could be a stroke, but the only thing that's certain about life is that it will end. You remain frozen, stuck, separated from God forever. That's what the Bible describes as hell. But that's not what God wants for you. That's why the moment after Adam and Eve ate the apple, and he was doling out the consequences, God also turned to the serpent, the Devil and He said,

"I declare war between you and the woman. Between your offspring and hers. He'll wound your head. You'll wound his heel." The head wound is much more serious. God promises, "I'm gonna break your skull!"

Christmas is when He made good on the promise by sending His Son to this earth. God's gift didn't go under the tree. *It went on it.* When God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born into this world, born under the Law, at the perfect time.

God's present to you is not a present...it's a person. (He turns the tree upside down to make a cross) That's the power of Christmas. Christ died on the cross and He paid the penalty for our sins.

And that is what Christmas is all about. Christmas is not a holiday, but a rescue mission. Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost. He didn't just die for you, He died as though He *were* you. For as He hung on that cross, Isaiah 53 says He took on Himself the sins of us all. He suffered as if He had personally committed all of those sins. 1 Peter 2:24 says,

²⁴ "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

Christmas is about Jesus dying on the cross. But He didn't just die. He rose on the third day. And He is ascended to heaven. And He's knocking at the door of your heart. If you let Him in, He can save you. He can change you in just a moment of time. He died as one of us.

I don't care what you've done. I've entered into your pain, I've entered into your shame. Are you an adulterer, an idolater, have you lied? I've died for you sins so you could be healed!

Christmas is for everyone. It's for shepherds, wise men, single mothers.

The Matthew family tree is just his father's side. The family tree on his mother's side is shorter.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1.

God came down. He wasn't just human. He was also Divine. So with one hand, He could take the hand of sinful humanity, and with the other hand, He could take the hand of His Father. He could bring back the connection that we lost.

Jesus is not a way to get to heaven. He is THE way, He is THE truth, He is THE life. Because only One who is fully God and fully man could do what He has done.

And here's the question? Would you like to give your life to Jesus Christ?