

FOR GOD IS WITH US!
Meditations by Fr. Deacon Dr. Joshua D. Genig
On St. Matthew 1:1 – 25
(Gospel for the Forefeast of the Nativity, 18 December 2016)
St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Redford, MI

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fr. Roman asked me to preach on this Gospel last year—the genealogy of Jesus. This year, he asked again, but this time, with a smile. Fr. Daneil then chimed in: “And now it’s *your* turn to read it!” Who said the Church didn’t practice deacon hazing?! But, given their joy at my pain, I’m certain that I’ll be preaching on this text next year too.

And that’s the way it seems, of course. It’s a pain to read this Gospel and preach on this Gospel and, sometimes, it’s even more painful to listen to it. 42 generations in all, filled with faces we do not know, and names we struggle to pronounce. Some sinners, others saints. But all of them, every last one of them, part of Jesus’ own family.

So why do we even do it at all? Why take the time to read such a tedious list?

We read these names every year, on *this* Sunday, the Forefeast of the Nativity, not simply as a history lesson; nor, really, do we read it to prove something — something like Jesus was a real person. No, the real purpose of this genealogy is to show us that the God Who appeared in Jesus has been traveling with us all along. And we read it on *this* Sunday because the Nativity, you see, is the moment when *our* history and *God’s* history collide. The Nativity is the moment—the single moment — when God’s history becomes our history, as God becomes man in the man, Jesus Christ.

But a word of caution amidst this story. Please, please, please don’t let him grow up too fast. We are so familiar with saying what I just said — that “God becomes man” or “God is made man.” But remember that, before he was a man, he was a baby. He was a baby like our babies— a baby who needed to be nursed and rocked and held and changed. He was a baby who got cold and got sick and even screamed in church. He was a baby who eventually got big and he got smart. But he came into this world, just as his ancestors had done so before him. He came as a little child into a very big world, a world filled with all sorts of grown-up troubles. But he did so for a very different purpose.

Remember how the Gospel reading ends:

“So all this was done [all of it, the whole 42 generations worth]
All of it was done so that it might be fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which means, ‘God with us.’”

The Gospel of St. Matthew—the Gospel of this genealogy—begins with His **name**: Immanuel, which means, God with us. And the Gospel of St. Matthew—this very same Gospel— ends with His **promise**: “Lo, I am with you always.”

God with us – Lo, I am with you always.

And so He was; and so He is. And He is with us, with the very stuff of this genealogy. He is with us now with his flesh and blood. All grown up, yes, of course, but with the tenderness of a child.

As Bernard of Clairvaux once said: “Now I know that God is not angry with me. For he is my flesh and blood. He is my baby.”

And it is in Him, and only in Him, it is only in this baby, that we can find the strength to sing next Saturday:

“God is with us, understand all ye nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with us.”

May our week be blessed as you and I, together, prepare to receive him again—into our hearts, into our souls, into our bodies, and even into our arms, with renewed hope and fresh strength and joy and peace that will carry us through to His Kingdom, a Kingdom which will have no end.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

