

# WOMEN IN THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

## MATT 1:1-17

Women in the Bible Series

### OPENING PRAYER

God of life, Who became part of a family tree- A tree of courage, story and survival, May we find courage and life In all of our families, In all of our stories, In all of our survivals. We ask this because we too have stories. We ask this in the name of Jesus and in the name of his many grannies.

### EXEGESIS AND REFLECTION

Matthew's genealogy names five women.

Tamar was a widow whose father-in-law refused to provide her with another son of his, going against the custom. Undaunted, she dressed up as a prostitute and, in disguise, seduced him and became pregnant. When he heard the news, he called out "Bring. Burn." She nonchalantly produced the signet, cord and staff which she'd taken and shamed him into responsibility. She's a grandmother of Jesus.

Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho. The exiles from Egypt sent spies to this city they wanted to conquer. The first thing they did was to visit Rahab's boudoir. Rahab said she'd hide the spies in exchange for refuge after the conquest. She survived. Her family survived. She's one of the grandmothers of Jesus.

And there's Ruth. She followed her mother-in-law to a land where she was a foreigner and invoked an ancient legal covenant saying "Where you go, I will go". Two single women in a time hostile to them. Naomi decided to give Ruth some advice about a certain man. She said "Go to where he sleeps during harvest and lift up his blanket, and uncover his 'foot' and, umm, use your imagination." Ruth is one of Jesus' grandmothers.

Bathsheeba was summoned to the king's house. She became pregnant and the king had her husband, Uriah, killed. She was taken as the wife of the king, and as punishment for all of this, her child's life was taken. Her home, husband and child were all taken away. Very few words are given to her. When she had her son Solomon, she decided that, even though he wasn't in line to be the next king, technicalities didn't matter. She arranged that her inheritance would be the kingdom. She's one of Jesus' grandmothers.

And then another woman - probably little older than 14. She, pregnant, was about to be divorced by her fiancée. The text says that he was going to divorce her privately, so as not to humiliate her, but that makes me think that a man wrote the text. Humiliation was already her lot,

and presumably would have been her lot no matter how private the divorce was. She's the mother of Jesus. Jesus was born into a great line of fearless matriarchs.

The stories of these women- the great grannies of Jesus- tells us that there have always been structures which seek to embed shame in the stories of our lives. There have always been ways in which we have oppressed others we do not understand. The stories of the grannies of Jesus tells us that God is always on the side of those on the margins. There we meet God, who is not just the one who welcomes us, but who asks us to welcome God. There we are both host and guest - we are made welcome, and we are asked to be welcoming - of our own stories, of the stories of others, of the lives of God. There we are welcomed into the great imagination, the one that welcomes every part of us - that which is expected, that which is unexpected, that which we must change, that which we must not try to change, that which will change us, resist as we might. We - every one of us and every single part of us - are welcomed, because we matter. We are made family in the God's great story. We are welcomed by the One whose name is welcome.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. With which of these extraordinary women would you want to have a conversation? What would you want to ask?
2. What, for you, is the effect of naming women of such strength in Jesus' genealogy?
3. Matthew uses this as the opening lines of the story of Jesus. If you were to begin telling the story of Jesus, where would you begin? Why?

## CLOSING PRAYER

God of Life,  
You do not reject the salty lives of the ancestors of Jesus. You honour them.  
May we honour all lives, including our own.  
Help us to see our own survivals and circumstances with eyes of dignity, not despair.  
We ask this because you are the one  
Who enters into life with all.  
Amen.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Carol A Newsome, Sharon H Ringe & Jacqueline E Lapsley (eds.) The Women's Bible Commentary (4th edition, London: SPCK, 2014)

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