LIBER GENERATIONIS IESU CHRISTI

The Genealogy of Christ

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." St Matthew arranges the ancestors of Our Lord in three groups of fourteen generations, marking three great epochs of sacred history: from the promise, to the kingdom, to the exile, and finally to the Messias.

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root." — Isaias 11:1



The Tree of Jesse, circle of Geertgen tot Sint Jans, c. 1500 (Rijksmuseum). From the sleeping Jesse springs the royal line, crowned by the Virgin and Child.

THE BOOK OF THE GENERATION

Why two genealogies?

St Matthew writes for the Jews and begins with **Abraham**, to whom the promise was made, descending through **David** and the kings to show that Jesus is the lawful heir of the royal throne. St Luke writes for the Gentiles and ascends from Jesus all the way to **Adam, "who was of God,"** to show that He is the Saviour of the whole human race.

Both lines pass through Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, for among the Jews inheritance and title passed through the father. Yet Our Lord is truly the Son of David by blood as well, for the Blessed Virgin was herself of David's house (Lk 1:32; Rom 1:3).

MATTHEW 1 AND LUKE 3

How do they agree?

From David the two lists diverge: Matthew follows Solomon and the kings; Luke follows another son, Nathan. The Fathers give two classic answers. **Julius Africanus** and St Augustine explain it by the levirate law: Jacob (Matthew) and Heli (Luke) were half-brothers, and Joseph was the natural son of one and legal son of the other. Many later authors hold that Luke traces **Mary's** line, Heli being her father, called St Joachim by tradition.

Three Times Fourteen Generations

Matthew 1:1–17 · Douay-Rheims spellings

THE PATRIARCHS · THE PROMISE

Abraham to David

1. **Abraham** — *father of the faithful*
2. Isaac
3. Jacob
4. Judas — *with Thamar*
5. Phares
6. Esron
7. Aram
8. Aminadab
9. Naasson
10. Salmon — *with Rahab*
11. Booz — *with Ruth*
12. Obed
13. Jesse
14. **David** — *the King*

THE KINGS OF JUDA · THE KINGDOM

David to the Exile

1. Solomon — *by her that had been the wife of Urias*
2. Roboam
3. Abia
4. Asa
5. Josaphat
6. Joram
7. Ozias
8. Joatham
9. Achaz
10. Ezechias — *healed through Isaias*
11. Manasses
12. Amon
13. Josias — *the reforming king*
14. Jechonias — *carried away to Babylon*

THE RETURN · THE WAITING

The Exile to Christ

1. Jechonias — *counted again*
2. Salathiel
3. Zorobabel — *rebuilt the Temple*
4. Abiud
5. Eliacim
6. Azor
7. Sadoc
8. Achim
9. Eliud
10. Eleazar
11. Mathan
12. Jacob
13. Joseph — *the husband of Mary*
14. **Jesus** — *who is called Christ*

LUKE 3:23–38 · FROM ABRAHAM BACK TO ADAM

Before Abraham: the line of the first ages

Adam › Seth › Enos › Cainan › Malaleel › Jared › Henoch › Mathusale › Lamech › Noe › Sem › Arphaxad › Cainan › Sale › Heber › Phaleg › Ragau › Sarug › Nachor › Thare › Abraham

Luke lists 77 names in all, from Jesus to "Adam, who was of God." The early names match Genesis 5 and 11 (the second Cainan follows the Septuagint). Thus Christ, the New Adam, is linked to the first.

Four Women in the Line

Unusually, Matthew names four women besides Our Lady — Gentiles or sinners, all signs of grace reaching beyond Israel.

GEN 38

Thamar

A Canaanite widow through whom the line of Judah continued.

JOS 2; HEB 11:31

Rahab

The harlot of Jericho saved by faith for hiding the spies.

BOOK OF RUTH

Ruth

A Moabitess whose loyalty brought her into Israel; great-grandmother of David.

2 KGS 11–12

Wife of Urias

Bethsabee, whose story recalls David's sin and repentance; mother of Solomon.

WHY FOURTEEN?

In Hebrew, letters stand for numbers. The name of David (D-W-D) adds up to 4 + 6 + 4 = 14. Matthew's threefold fourteen proclaims Jesus as the Son of David, the King. To reach the pattern he omits some kings — a common practice in Jewish genealogies.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Matthew breaks his own pattern at the end. Instead of "Joseph begot Jesus," he writes "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." The wording guards the virginal conception: Joseph is the legal father, but the Child is conceived of the Holy Ghost.