

Homily for 17 December 2024

[Gen 49, 2-10; Mt 1, 1-17](#)

Starting today, we sing the famous 'O' antiphons, which introduce us lyrically to the joy of the Christmas season. The Gospels for the last five days before Christmas are taken from the first chapter of Luke, but those for today and tomorrow are taken from the first chapter of Matthew.

The translation of the liturgical lectionary begins elegantly with the words: ' *This is the table of the origins of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham* '. This elegant translation is far from having all the force of the original Greek text which, if we translate it literally, reads: ' *Book of Genesis (or birth) of Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham* '.

Matthew's aim is not to be a precise genealogist. Rather, it is to show how the birth of Jesus fits into the history of humanity, and particularly that of the Hebrew people. What we celebrate at Christmas is not the anniversary of Jesus' birth, but the fact that God became incarnate, that he became man at a precise moment in the history of humanity. He became incarnate in a specific people and a specific culture. This people was aware that it had been chosen by God. Of course, they were not alone in being chosen. Every human being has been chosen by God since before the creation of the world and has the vocation to become God's adopted son/daughter. In the same way, every people is chosen and loved by God. The specific characteristic of the Jewish people, in ancient times, is that they were very keenly aware of this choice, this election, this personal love of God.

In the text we have just read, Matthew divides the history of the people of Israel into three great periods. Historically, there is something artificial about this arrangement; Matthew's aim is not to write history, but to convey a spiritual message. He therefore offers us a spiritual interpretation of the history of Israel. The first period runs from the vocation of Abraham to the reign of David: a great period in which the Jewish people experienced the great interventions of God in their history, in particular the liberation from Egypt, the long period of training in the desert, and then the settlement in the promised land. The second period was what we might call the human development of Israel, under several successive kings, leading to the enrichment of some, the oppression of the poor by the rich and finally exile as punishment for this estrangement from God. The third period is more humble: the return from exile, the rediscovery of the Law, the development of a spirituality of spiritual poverty, that of the Anawim. It is then that the Messiah can be born.

Document extrait du [site de l'abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont](#), qui se trouve sur le territoire de Forges, à sept kilomètres au sud de la ville de Chimay, en Belgique. Notre-Dame de Scourmont est une abbaye de l'Ordre Cistercien de la Stricte Observance.

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These three periods correspond to those of any spiritual journey, which we each experience in our own way. There is the period when, having reached a certain human and spiritual maturity, we perceive God's call upon us and want to respond. God then does marvellous things in us. Then we want to take charge, we want to direct our own path, determine our own growth, assert ourselves if necessary by crushing others around us. Then, if we open ourselves to the grace of conversion, a third dimension can be established in our lives (it's more a dimension than a period): we become more aware of our limits, our poverty, and our dependence on God. Then he can be born in us in a new way every day.

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