

Women in Jesus' genealogy

In today's Gospel reading we read: "David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah."

Is there any significance in stating that Solomon's mother was the wife of Uriah? Was Uriah related to David? Is there something in Mosaic law, like raising sons in a deceased brother's name with his wife, for men that you leave childless through murder? Was this a double shame that David committed by not allowing a brother of Uriah to marry Bathsheba and raise children in his name? Why recall the murder of Uriah in the line of lineage? Ruth is not mentioned to have been the wife of another man than Boaz. Also Solomon's mother's name is left out, unlike Rahab, Tamar and Ruth. Finally what is the significance of naming these women (other than that they were once gentiles) when the lineage is from the father, other than noting that lack of needing a "pure" line for the messiah?

Uriah is identified in Scripture as a Hittite (cf. 2 Sam. 11:3) and not as an Israelite. He is not one of David's brothers and the David-Uriah episode has nothing to do with the Levirate laws in which a man would marry his brother's widow—a practice alluded to by Jesus in his disputations with the Sadducees (cf. Lk. 20:27-40).

Four foreign women are named in the genealogy: Tamar (Gen. 38; 1 Chron. 2:4), Rahab (Josh. 2:6, 17), Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:12, 24), and Ruth (Book of Ruth). The presence of these gentiles in Jesus' family tree hint at the universal ("catholic") scope of the Gospel. While there is some precedent for including women in a Jewish genealogy (cf. 1 Chron. 32, 39, 50; 2:4), they usually are omitted. Perhaps they are included here for the purpose I just mentioned.

There's probably something else going on here. One reliable commentator suggests that Matthew is defusing Jewish accusations that the foreign women (not to mention the illicit/sinful liaisons) somehow undermine Jesus' credentials as the Messiah. By including these problematic elements in the generations before Solomon, Matthew implies that if these women/relationships did not disqualify Solomon as the royal son of David, then they shouldn't disqualify Jesus, either. In fact, Solomon's birth through the immorally contrived union of David and Uriah's wife stands in vivid contrast to Mary's virginal conception of Jesus, which Matthew tells us about in verse 18.

And one other thing: by mentioning the sinners in Jesus' line, we see that God works out His plan of salvation notwithstanding human weakness and sin. Even more, as we vividly see through the genealogy, He completely identifies with us, having entered into the messy business of human history as a baby in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jesus' contact with human history doesn't defile Him, but rather saves and elevates us—and in a wondrously mysterious way makes straight a lot of crooked lines in the process!