

## Study

Read **2 Corinthians 5:17-21** & **Psalm 139:13-16**. How do these passages give us a better understanding of our identity in Christ?

Have a look at the genealogy in **Matthew 1** and consider the significance of the women mentioned in the list. How does God work through our mess and mistakes?

## Living it out (Application):

Why do we often fail to see ourselves as God sees us? What practical ways can help us to remedy this?  
God doesn't write anyone off and so neither must we. What will that love look like in your life this week?

## Coming Up at St Mark's

**Trip to the Holy Land.** March 2015. There will be an introductory meeting at Guy's at 7.30pm on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March.

**Naked Truth Prayer Event.** Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March 7.30pm. Led by Ian Henderson. Seeking to pray for our area and to challenge the grip of pornography.

**Youth/Children's Strategy** is under review. Please see recent notices for how you can participate by Feb 10<sup>th</sup>.



prayer

### *Please pray for...*

Read Ephesians 3:14-21: A prayer for the Ephesians. Use this to pray for yourself & people on your heart.

Pray for the HG1000 launch at St Mark's this Thursday – that the campaign could bring hope to many, and bear witness to the Kingdom in the Harrogate area.

Pray for Jane Hodson, Susie Appleby's sister, who starts chemo on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

Pray for wisdom as Dan leads a review of our children/youth strategy – you can participate as well! See down below...

Pray for the people of Syria.

Pray for Homegroup leaders – for vision and love. Maybe you could pray for them to be baptized in the Spirit...

Pray for those affected by recent flooding.

#### **Mission Partner Prayer Focus:**

Pray for **Caring for Life**, who seek to share Jesus' love with the vulnerable, and for **Pam Young** in her work as PA to the CEO.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

**Thank you for your prayers for this church community!**



St Mark's

Inspiring each other to  
love and follow Jesus Christ...  
everywhere in everything

# INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2014

## Worship/reflection:

When people say, "Who are you?" what do you say? Watch the following Youtube clip and thank God for the different ways He sees us as His children.

<http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=hsDQEb-qlyM>

### **Luke 3: 21-38. Who do you think you are?**

"Who do you think you are?" is the name of a popular BBC television series, in which celebrities trace their ancestry in a bid to find out more about themselves. Family history as a way of helping to determine who we are was important in biblical times too as we will see later with Luke's account of the genealogy of Jesus. If I were to ask you: "Who do you think you are?" what I wonder would be your reply? You might refer to yourself through other members of your family. Perhaps who you think you are comes from your professional status. You might even draw upon experiences from throughout your life... Sadly, **today's culture dictates that we often define ourselves by what we do or have, who we know, and whether our family background & connections are of a high enough social standing.** Well I don't know about you but if that's the case, I might as well go home now!

However, Jesus' baptism helps us to see ourselves and each other quite differently. In Luke chapter 2, we learn of Jesus' own awareness of his identity as the Son of God when aged 12 and assumed to be lost in the temple, he declares to Mary & Joseph, "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" At his baptism we have the first public declaration of who Jesus is and what his ministry will be. And what a declaration! Heaven has spoken. "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Not only does **God affirm Jesus as his beloved son** but the Holy Spirit in bodily form appears and anoints him and serves as **the enabling presence that comes in and through knowing and choosing to follow him.** God's declaration of love for Jesus comes before he has begun his ministry. **Jesus hasn't had to do anything to earn God love.** The wonderful thing about it is that it is freely given.

As a young girl I was the youngest of four children. In preparation for the week ahead, Sunday night was bath night, whether we needed it or not! In those days, hot water was in short supply & it was expensive to heat it up. We didn't have much money so the protocol in our house was as follows: the bath was filled once and then each of us children, according to age, took turns to bathe starting with the eldest. So after my brother & 2 sisters had had their bath, I finally got to take my turn. Of course by this time the bubbles had disappeared and the water was cold. But worse than that for me was the thought of all the grime & dirt from my siblings in the water that was now supposed to be washing me clean. **I always felt when I got out the bath that I was dirtier than when I went in.**

In many ways Jesus' baptism is a bit like that. Of course Jesus, the perfect man, who was without sin, didn't need to be baptized. Yet Jesus accepted baptism not to wash away his sins but **to fully immerse himself in the waters that had washed away the sins of all of humanity** as a way of demonstrating his willingness to take those sins upon himself and make us more acceptable to God. Hundreds of years before Christ's coming, Isaiah had declared that the Messiah "was numbered with the transgressors; For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa 53:12) All of this, including the affirming voice of God, serve to commission Jesus, the Messiah, as the servant King, the one who will suffer and die for the people and the world.

In this way, Jesus also saw his baptism as the beginning of his ministry, "the fulfillment of righteousness" as it is stated in Matthew's gospel. In other words, and Luke is keen to emphasize this, **Jesus acts in complete obedience to his Father's will.** Interestingly, the Holy Spirit descends as Jesus was praying. Luke alone notes this detail, yet with this unique mention of **prayer the theme of devotion and nearness to God emerges. Jesus looks to God during every step of his mission.** Here he is living out the words that he later encouraged us all to pray; "Your will be done, on earth as in heaven." It's an example that we are all challenged to follow, yet a reminder that God's amazing and affirming love is with us all the way. And look at the reward: "You are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased." Or as the Message puts it "You are my son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life." By acknowledging his unparalleled love & grace & giving ourselves over entirely to God the Father, we too are able to understand who we really are. Missionary statesman Dr. E Stanley Jones said: **"One does not know who he is until he knows whose he is."** That's not to say that our earthly relationships & experiences aren't important, but it's to acknowledge that above all things we too, no matter what we do or have, irrelevant of our family and social connections, are beloved sons & daughters of God, chosen, loved and cherished by him. This is who you are to God. Who do you think you are? How will you respond to such love?

The next thing Luke puts into his gospel is that huge list of names – the Genealogy. It's a family tree stretching back from Joseph, Jesus' human father, to God himself. Why on earth is this list here? And anyway, why start with Joseph? Wasn't Jesus Mary's son – Luke has told us clearly that the young Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived.... Shouldn't we be following Mary's line? Probably back in biblical times it was more important to have a clear sense of family heritage through the father's line... But even so... Why should Luke include this particular list here? What should we make of it? Is Luke is showing us that Jesus' family line goes back to God? Perhaps to back up the declaration from heaven he has just heard? The list ends with "son of Adam, son of God." Seems a strange way to prove it – especially as there are about 77 other names here who are also by definition sons of God. Or is the list perhaps to prove that Jesus is a bona fide Jew, of royal descent, of David's line? We know from the Old Testament that the promised Saviour would come from Jesse and David's family line. (Isaiah 11:1)

A third possibility could be that the list is to show that Jesus is Abraham's son. Remember that God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, and that through him "all peoples on earth would be blessed". (Genesis 12:3) God did the seemingly impossible, and old, old Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac. And many generations later, Jesus fulfils that promise, doesn't he? Through Jesus, God is reaching out in his love to all peoples on earth. Well, Luke does not help us! He does not explain this genealogy. He gives no comment whatsoever. I wonder.... how many of those names did you recognise? Maybe you recognised the "giants of faith" like Joshua, David, Abraham, Adam. Who were all those other men? The list we read today includes all sorts of people, great men of God, saints and sinners, 'somebodies' and apparent 'nobodys', giants of faith and historical footnotes, everyone, all stemming from God himself. It's a list that at one end leads to Jesus, and at the other end to God. In between are lots of men (and, one has to assume, lots of women too!) All of them are part of God's salvation plan, the 'reaching out' of God's love through Jesus. **Some of these people were probably unaware of their involvement,** aware of their human heritage and family tree, but unaware of God's bigger picture

Some as we have said were giants of faith. Many of these people were probably painfully aware of their sin – David springs to mind with his high profile affair with Bathsheba – but many others too. It is therefore a list of names like any other. Inclusive and varied. But at one end we have Jesus, and at the other end, God the Father. Our gracious God, in his love, doesn't choose us to be in his family based on our looks, qualifications, culture or background. Family connections and hierarchy don't matter to God – everyone can be part of God's family because it depends not on our efforts but on his grace. We heard in the reading from Ephesians that God's whole family, in heaven and on earth, derives its name, its identity, from Him. He really is the Father of all, first as Creator, and reaching out in Jesus as Saviour.

Have you ever reached rock bottom? Run out of your own resources and strength? When I was in my 20s, I thought I was doing a great job for God. I was on lots of good 'lists' if you like. I'd passed my degree, I was employed in my first job, giving guided tours of a historic church in the city centre during the week, and I was involved in a big student church fellowship. Life felt full of meaning and purpose. At the time, I was sharing a house with 3 other Christian girls, I was attending weekly bible studies, going to prayer meetings. We even had a house prayer time each week. And yet it was during this year, during one of those house prayer times, that I hit rock bottom. Somewhat self-righteously the previous week I had replied to the curate when she asked me "how can I pray for you this week?", "Oh, please can you pray that I understand God's grace a bit more deeply?" At the time I am ashamed to say that I thought she would be impressed with my theological prayer request! Grace was a word that I kept hearing, kept reading, but it seemed to bounce off me and never take hold of my heart. I understood the idea of undeserved love, but secretly I considered myself quite deserving of God's love. When I sat down with my housemates to pray, I was blown away. Did I fall off the chair? Did God push me off it!? I was on the floor, kneeling down, bent double, so aware of God's holiness and power in the room around us and at the same time intensely aware of my own sinfulness, of how useless I was and how weak, how shallow all my efforts were. I remember feeling like an empty jar, and saying to God, I feel utterly unworthy of your love – please fill me up. I depend on you for everything. Grace, God's love for us, undeserving as we are. So, if we're totally accepted by God's grace, as forgiven people, why do we take so much notice of where our names appear, what our family background or qualifications are, and what lists, or rotas we are included on?

Maybe God has done great things through you, and you will continue to serve him because you have seen his faithfulness in the past. Or maybe you are more like a Naggai, a Melchi or an "Er"! Someone, you feel, whose name will be forgotten, or just be a footnote in God's plan. You might wonder, like me, "How can God be interested in me? Can God really use me?" God's answer to these questions is a resounding "Yes!" We can have confidence in asking that question, "who do you think you are?" because Jesus' life, his death for us, and his resurrection invite us to be part of his family, as precious children of God. This list tells us something **really significant about our identity.** God calls you his precious son or daughter, so wherever your name appears, remember who you are. Is your name on the list of those who are sick, the list of carers, the coffee rota, the list of ex-offenders, school governors, Sunday school teachers, the disabled, the bereaved the staff list, the partners, the open church rota, the homeless, your family tree...? Behind all of these lists, being a child of God is the identity that counts. Because we have seen that God is at the top and bottom of the list. He includes everyone in his love. And how about when we see one another's names on some of these lists? The knowledge of this love will radically affect the way we see others. Paul's prayer is that as we allow God's love to fill us up we will grasp how "wide and long and high and deep" is Jesus' love. (Eph 3: 18) No one is beyond its reach. Are there people you have written off? They are not written off by God. He loves them. So must we. What will that love look like in your life and mine this week? Because, not only did Jesus take our sin at his baptism, walking into the dirty river aged 30, but he took it and dealt with it once and for all three years later. He went all the way to the cross, love stretching wide and deep, taking our place, dying in our place, in order that we might know the freedom of being God's forgiven children, in whom God delights. There's an exchange of identity going on – Jesus takes our sin, our failings and rubbishness, and through his death on the cross Jesus' identity becomes ours. As another gospel writer, John, says: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God – and that is what we are!"