



THE JUNIA PROJECT  
ADVENT  
DEVOTIONAL

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INTRODUCTION

“It is now, at Advent, that I am given the chance to suspend all expectation...and instead to revel in the mystery.”

*Jerusalem Jackson Greer*

The Advent season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Day. During Advent we have the opportunity to look back and reflect on Christ’s coming to earth, while at the same time looking forward to his return.

This book contains five devotionals about the women mentioned in Christ’s lineage in Matthew 1: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba (listed as “the wife of Uriah), and Mary of Nazareth. We suggest the readings be used for personal reflection on each of the four Sundays in Advent and on Christmas Eve.

As you reflect on the unique role each woman played in making way for the coming of the Messiah, we pray that God will firmly impress on your heart the special role you have to play as well.


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## THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH


<sup>1</sup> This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac,  
Isaac the father of Jacob,  
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

<sup>3</sup> Judah the father of Perez and Zerah,  
whose mother was TAMAR   
Perez the father of Hezron,  
Hezron the father of Ram,

<sup>4</sup> Ram the father of Amminadab,  
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,  
Nahshon the father of Salmon,

<sup>5</sup> Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was RAHAB   
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was RUTH   
Obed the father of Jesse,

<sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of King David.  
David was the father of Solomon,  
whose mother was URIAH'S WIFE 

<sup>7</sup> Solomon the father of Rehoboam,  
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,  
Abijah the father of Asa,

<sup>8</sup> Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,  
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,  
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

<sup>9</sup> Uzziah the father of Jotham,  
Jotham the father of Ahaz,  
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,


<sup>10</sup> Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,  
Manasseh the father of Amon,  
Amon the father of Josiah,  
<sup>11</sup> and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers...

<sup>12</sup> After the exile to Babylon:  
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,  
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

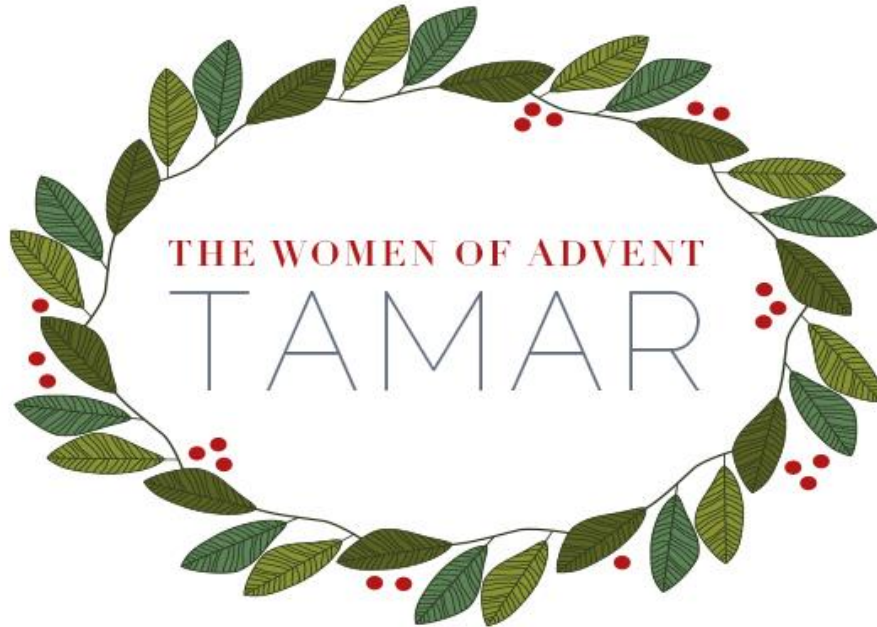
<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,  
Abihud the father of Eliakim,  
Eliakim the father of Azor,

<sup>14</sup> Azor the father of Zadok,  
Zadok the father of Akim,  
Akim the father of Elihud,

<sup>15</sup> Elihud the father of Eleazar,  
Eleazar the father of Matthan,  
Matthan the father of Jacob,

<sup>16</sup> and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of **MARY**   
and Mary was the mother of Jesus  
who is called the Messiah.

Matthew 1:1-16 NIV



## CHAPTER ONE: TAMAR

Gail Wallace

Tamar is the first woman mentioned in the genealogy recorded in Matthew (1:3). Her story is sandwiched in between the story of Joseph (of many-colored coat fame) being sold into slavery by his brothers in Genesis 37, and his encounter with Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39.

It is a story of strength and courage, but one that is easily misunderstood. Tamar's unusual course of action ensured the continuation of the line of Judah from which Jesus, the Lion of Judah, would come. The complete biblical account is recorded in [Genesis 38](#). Here is a short recap.

Tamar's father-in-law, Judah, was one of Joseph's older brothers. When our story starts, Judah has left his father's house and has put down his roots elsewhere, marrying a Canaanite woman who bears him three sons.

In Genesis 38:6-7 we read that Judah arranges for Tamar to marry his oldest son, Er, but Er "was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death" before any children were born. According to Near Eastern law and custom, in this circumstance the next-born son is obligated to marry the widow and serve as a surrogate so that she will have an heir. [1]

So Judah instructs his second son, Onan, to sleep with Tamar and fulfill this obligation. This son spurns his obligations and also dies at the hand of the

Lord. His motivation was most likely greed, since an heir produced with Tamar would inherit half of his father's estate.

At this point, Judah looks for a way out of his obligation to Tamar. There is one more son, but he is too young to marry. It would have been acceptable for Judah himself to serve as a surrogate under the customs of the day. In fact, he was obligated to do so or release her so she can remarry.

But rather than recognizing that his sons' deaths are the consequence of their own evil choices, Judah blames Tamar; not willing to take the risk that he or his remaining son might fall prey to the same fate.

Instead, Judah goes against custom and sends Tamar to live as a widow in her father's house. But unlike other widows, she cannot remarry and must stay chaste on pain of death. As time passes, Tamar realizes Judah is not going to do the right thing. In fact, he has chosen not to act at all, making no provisions for her future and putting his own family in danger of extinction.

In those days women had no legal recourse, and so Tamar is faced with a serious choice: submit to Judah's authority or come up with a way to conceive within his family.

Here's where things get interesting; even scandalous to Western eyes. After what the Bible says is "a long period of time" (Genesis 38:12) we read that Tamar learns that Judah's wife has died and that his time of mourning has ended. Hearing that Judah is headed to the sheep shearing at Timnah (the equivalent of a modern-day business trip), she comes up with a plan to get him to sleep with her in hopes of getting pregnant. [2]

Tamar disguises herself so that Judah mistakes her for a prostitute, as expected he propositions her, and she conceives. No wonder so many preachers skip over this chapter when teaching Genesis! Before he leaves, she asks for a token of good faith until he returns with payment for her "services", and he hands over his signet, cord, and staff. This would be the Near Eastern equivalent of legal identification by today's standards, and this evidence will prove her innocence later on, saving her life and the lives of the twin boys just conceived.

When it becomes obvious that Tamar is pregnant, Judah is incensed at the shame brought upon his family and calls for her to be burned. When Tamar sends him his seal and staff, he realizes what has happened and admits that he is the father. Not only that, Judah praises Tamar for her actions.

Binz writes,

“The climax of the story comes with Judah’s shocked and humbled response: *‘She is more righteous than I’* (v. 26). Tamar has acted out of the highest motives by having a child within the family of Judah. She has honored the demands of her relationship with her deceased husband, whereas Judah has not. By taking unconventional risks and humbling herself in order to hold Judah accountable, she is judged more honorable and maintains the line of Judah.” [3]

When this story is told, Tamar’s actions are usually characterized as adulterous (Adam Clarke’s Commentary), revengeful (Easton Bible Dictionary), or as an act of prostitution. But examining the context of the time can help us better understand the scene. Spackman suggests that “Tamar veils herself not because veils were traditionally worn by harlots, but to conceal her identity from Judah. Judah likely assumed she was a harlot because she was at a crossroads or city entrance, where harlots traditionally stationed themselves.” [4]

Although we can argue that the way she went about it was morally wrong, by Israelite standards Tamar was justified in her attempt to get Judah to carry out the responsibility he had dodged. He had unfairly deprived her of children, an inheritance, and the opportunity to remarry. “Genesis records neither taint of illicitness in their offspring nor criticism of Tamar. Her actions were unusual but, once clearly understood, not immoral by “the laws and commandments and circumstances of [her] day.” [5]

John Wesley goes further in defending Tamar’s motives:

“She believed the promise made to Abraham and his seed, particularly that of the Messiah, and...was therefore desirous to have a child by one of that family, that she might have the honor, or at least stand fair for the honor of being the mother of the Messiah.” [6]

Fast forward about nine months, and we learn that Tamar has given birth to twins, and both are named in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:3).

When the narrative resumes in chapter 42 Judah has returned to his family and changed his ways.

“[Tamar’s] boldness, initiative, and willingness to defy society’s expectations have enabled God to provide Judah with two new sons after the death of his first two sons. By continuing to consider herself a member of Judah’s family and insisting on securing her own future

within its parameters, she has made it possible for that family to thrive and develop into a major tribe and eventually the Judean state...

Tamar passes from the scene, but her impact continues...the woman who transformed the history of the kingdom of Judah also transformed Judah himself...the rest of Genesis shows him back in Jacob's family. He had betrayed Joseph out of jealousy, but he henceforth acts out of loyalty to his brother Benjamin and his father, and is willing to stand up to the Egyptians in order to ensure their safety..." [7]

After a dangerous detour, the actions of Tamar ensure that the house of Judah aligns once more with God's purposes.

*"From Judah will come the cornerstone."*

Zechariah 10:4a


## REFLECT

*Read Tamar's story in [Genesis 38](#).*

*What do you think motivated Tamar to take such extreme action?*

*Why do you think Tamar is considered significant in the history of Israel?*

*What can you take away from Tamar's story about your own significance in God's eyes?*

 Lord, in this Advent season, give us the courage and audacity of Tamar to stay the course.



## NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

[1] [Levirate law](#) protected a widow by giving her every opportunity to bear a son, and have a family of her own. Another option was to release her from any family obligation so that she could remarry.

[2] For more on the “sheep-shearing festival” and how it impacts the story read [The Skeleton in Judah’s Closet](#) by Bob Deffinbaugh.

[3] Binz, S.J. (2011). [Women of the Torah: Matriarchs and Heroes of Israel](#). Brazos Press, Baker Publishing Group. Grand Rapids: MI.

[4] Spackman, B. (2010). [The Story of Judah and Tamar](#). *Religious Educator* 11(1). 65-76.

[5] Spackman, IBID

[6] Wesley, J. (1754-1765) [Wesley’s Explanatory Notes Bible Commentary](#).

[7] Frymer-Kensky, T. (2002). [Reading the Women of the Bible](#). Schocken Books, New York.



## CHAPTER TWO: RAHAB

Kate Wallace

In the Christian tradition, we often assign nicknames to characters in scripture, such as “Doubting Thomas” and the “Virgin Mary”. These nicknames are not always a bad thing, but they do affect our understanding of certain characters and stories. For example, always describing Thomas as “doubting” brings negative connotations into stories in which Thomas doesn’t show signs of doubt. Likewise, perpetually understanding Mary as “the virgin” ignores the fact that she went on to have other children after Jesus, as noted in [Matthew 13:55-56](#).

### RENAMING RAHAB

Nicknames can be helpful, but sometimes we use them simply because it is tradition to do so. The problem is that teaching out of tradition instead of scripture can give us a simplified version of the story, and not necessarily an accurate one. This is important to keep in mind when learning about Rahab, because very few stories are as misunderstood, due to nicknames, as hers.

Rahab’s story is recorded in [Chapter 2](#) and [Chapter 6](#) of the book of Joshua.

## RAHAB "THE PROSTITUTE"

Rahab is commonly referred to as "Rahab the prostitute". This isn't surprising when we consider that scripture also calls her this, but it can be problematic. The difficulty isn't that it is incorrect, but that it limits our understanding of who she was.

In Christian tradition, the word "prostitute" is almost synonymous with "great sinner". "Prostitute" makes us think of a woman willfully selling herself in order to make a profit. But in a patriarchal time and culture where women did not have authority over their lives or futures, it is safe to assume that prostitution was not a voluntary industry.

A more comprehensive view of prostitution in Old Testament times (and even today) includes the reality that most of these women were victims of sex slavery. Perhaps "prostitute" should bring imagery into our minds about someone who is in bondage, not someone voluntarily living a life of sin. Regardless of the circumstances, to focus on this as the primary indication of her identity misses the greater contribution she makes to the survival and history of Israel.

Breaking free of the traditional view of Rahab allows us to learn afresh from the scriptures, and give us a fuller understanding of this ancestor of Jesus. The Bible has quite a lot to say about this woman, whom Church tradition has often sidelined as a harlot. Here are a few highlights.

## RAHAB "THE SOCIAL OUTCAST"

Rahab had three strikes against her: She was a foreigner, a woman, and a prostitute. [1] In other words, she was the epitome of the social outcast. She is not someone who we would expect to defy a king, save Israelite spies, and play a part in God's people taking the Promised Land. But this is exactly what happens.

Rahab is the first occupant of the foreign lands to show loyalty to Israel and Yahweh, and is welcomed in as a new member of the nation of Israel.[2] Rahab's story shows that God not only has a place for the socially marginalized and abused, but that He also raises them up to do great things.

## RAHAB "THE RESCUER"

Frymer-Kensky notes that "The book of Joshua tells the tale of the entry into Canaan as a mirror image of the Exodus from Egypt, filling the account of the events of the entry with allusions to the Exodus."<sup>[3]</sup> Throughout Moses' life women saved him, from the midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh, to his wife, Zipporah, who appeased God's anger.

Similarly, Rahab acts for the spies as the midwives did for Moses when she defies the king's commands in order to save them. Further correlations can be drawn between the two stories as Rahab even hides the spies from the king's men, as Moses' mother hid him from Pharaoh.<sup>[4]</sup> Rahab's story remind us that throughout the Old Testament, God uses women to protect His plans for the future of the nation of Israel.

## RAHAB "THE PROPHET"

In Joshua 2:8-11, Rahab gives a declaration to the spies that Israel will successfully take over the land of Jericho. The Israelites do not yet know this to be true, but her words bear weight with them and they carry her message back to Joshua.

Rahab's foretelling of the work of the Lord causes Joshua to move into action. Frymer-Kensky says it beautifully, "The first prophet after Moses to announce to Israel the paths of her history, Rahab becomes the first oracle of Israel's destiny". <sup>[5]</sup>

## RAHAB "FORESHADOW OF THE COMING SAVIOR"

If we adopt the idea that Rahab was more than likely a victim of sex slavery (and even possibly child trafficking), we get a very different view of her than tradition teaches. As this kind of prostitute, Rahab would have been socially marginalized, not because of her own sin, but because of the abuses done to her.

It's an interesting idea, and the more I learn about modern-day human trafficking, the more I believe that this would have been the situation. She may not have initiated or willfully consented to the acts of prostitution performed, yet she would have to carry the weight of other people's sin, through social stigma, as if it was her own.

Who else in scripture knows that kind of pain and burden other than Christ? Christ carried the weight of our sins on the cross as if they were his own. Rahab foreshadows the coming Savior, who will be one of her descendants, and who will bear the sins of the world. Rahab plays the temporary savior to Israel by protecting the spies, declaring their victory, and enabling God's plan to move forward.

#### RAHAB IN LIGHT OF ADVENT

Rahab is a courageous and clever woman, listed among Israelite heroes in [Hebrews 11:31](#) for her faith. Regardless of her past, this biblical heroine goes on to establish a family in the land of Israel, one that will continue for generations and will eventually include Jesus of Nazareth.


In Matthew 1 we read that one of Rahab's descendants is Boaz, who marries the next woman listed in Christ's lineage, Ruth. Like Tamar before them, these "outsider" women play an important role in preparing the way for the coming Messiah.

#### REFLECT

*Read Rahab's story in Joshua [Chapter 2](#) & [6](#). What impresses you about her story and how God used her? What does that say about the nature of God?*

*Rahab is commended for her faith in Hebrews 11. According to scripture, Rahab believed in God even before she met him. What can we learn from this incredible display of faith?*

*After reviewing Rahab's story, which "renaming" of her are you most drawn to? Why? What does this name bring to the story that "prostitute" does not?*

 Lord, in this Advent season, may we have the active faith of Rahab. May it cause us to live bravely, see you accurately, and serve you humbly.

## NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

[1] Frymer-Kensky, [Reading the Women of the Bible](#), pg. 35

[2] Ibid, pg. 37

[3] Ibid, pg. 36

[4] Ibid, pg. 36

[5] Ibid, pg. 298

Links to more reading on Rahab:

[Rahab: Bible](#) by Frymer-Kensky, Jewish Women's Archive

[Rahab: Midrash and Aggadah](#) by Tamar Kadari, Jewish Women's Archive

[Rahab the Harlot?](#) by Robin Ngo, Bible Archaeology Society



## CHAPTER THREE: RUTH

Gail Wallace

Like Tamar and Rahab before her, Ruth “the Moabite” is not of Jewish descent, yet she plays a significant part in the history of Israel as told in the Old Testament [Book of Ruth](#). In Jewish tradition the Scroll of Ruth is read every year at the festival of Shavuot, and Ruth’s famous pledge to her mother-in-law Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) is hailed as a model for faith conversion. Ruth is essentially a drama in four acts, written by an unknown author. Here is a brief summary of the story.

### ACT 1

An Israelite family (Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion) moves from Bethlehem to nearby Moab to escape a famine. The sons marry Moabite women, but tragedy strikes and all three women are widowed. With no hope for a future in Moab, Naomi gathers her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, and they head back to Bethlehem. This was no simple journey, but one that would have taken about a week, depending on the starting point. [1]

Along the way Naomi has a change of heart, and urges the younger women to return to Moab, releasing them from their marital obligations and giving them a second chance for a family in their own land. Orpah takes her up on

the offer and turns back but Ruth stays, pledging to Naomi "Wherever you go, I will go...your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (1:16).

## ACT 2

Although relatives of Naomi's late husband still live in Bethlehem, no one comes forward to help the two women. Ruth takes the initiative to save them from starvation by following the reapers in the fields to glean what was left behind and using the earnings to buy food. [2] She ends up gleaning in a field owned by Boaz, a wealthy relative. Boaz is impressed by Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and takes an interest in her welfare, offering privileges and protection in the fields (apparently this was not the safest place for a woman to work). Ruth gleans until the end of the harvest season, which means she worked the fields for about two months.

## ACT 3

When the harvest season ends so does their income, and still no one in the family comes to their aid. Concerned, Naomi instructs Ruth to go to Boaz privately in at night to try and get him to agree to a marriage proposal. But Ruth takes it a step further and petitions Boaz to take on the role of kinsman-redeemer; a tradition of taking responsibility for destitute relatives. [3] Impressed by Ruth's character and loyalty to Naomi, Boaz agrees to do both.

## ACT 4

The arrangements are made with no small degree of diplomacy, since there is a closer relative who must be dealt with first and money is involved. Ruth and Boaz marry, and have a son, making Ruth an ancestor of David, Israel's most celebrated king. The story ends with a host of blessings all around and a brief genealogy from Perez (one of Tamar's sons) to King David.

I've heard a few sermons on Ruth, for there is plenty to glean here (pun intended). Much can be said about her devotion to her mother-in-law, the role of Boaz as a kinsman redeemer, and the unusual interaction between Ruth and Boaz. But in thinking about the story in light of Advent, I am intrigued by two other themes: the purpose of the genealogy at the end of the book and the prominence of the geography in the story.



## THE PURPOSE OF THE GENEALOGY

While the Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy, the Book of Ruth ends with one:

"These are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab,<sup>2</sup>Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David." [Ruth 4:18-22](#).

I don't usually find genealogies all that interesting, but this one gets my attention. For one thing, we learn that only does Naomi's family survive, it thrives once Ruth and Boaz are married, with just a few generations separating their story from that of the shepherd boy and king, David.

The genealogy also establishes that Ruth, Boaz, and their son Obed were from the tribe of Judah. The preceding chapters describe Ruth's conversion to Judaism, her reputation for being a woman of valor, and her marriage to Boaz. These are milestones that justify and validate her inclusion in the family history. (The phrase translated as "a woman of valor", is the same phrase used in Proverbs 3:10 to describe a virtuous woman - "eschet hayil".)

Because Moab and Israel had a long history of conflict and intermarriage between the two countries was frowned upon, some scholars believe that the genealogy is included as a way of defending David's right to the throne at a time when his legitimacy was being challenged. [4]

"The Book of Ruth [conveys that] Ruth the Moabite is ultimately integrated into the Israelite community and is accepted by that community (the exclusion of Moabites in Deut. 23:4 notwithstanding)...By ending with David, the book celebrates the rewards granted to Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz because of their virtuous actions". [5]

In a sense, Ruth's son Obed represents the reuniting of the families of Lot and Abraham. The nation of Moab was descended from Lot's son, and these families had been separated for many generations. That is a story for another time, but it is not surprising that God choose Ruth "the Moabite" to be a participant in reconciliation. In an important way, her story "functions as a counterpoint to the negative attitude toward Moabite and other foreign women in the biblical accounts of Ezra-Nehemiah". [6]

## PROMINENCE OF THE GEOGRAPHY

When I visited Israel I began to understand how the Book of Ruth relates to the greater narrative of the Bible. Since Bethlehem is in the West Bank and governed by the Palestinian National Authority, our bus had to pass through “Rachel’s Crossing”, a guarded Israeli checkpoint.

Between the checkpoint and our destination we passed through the suburb of Beit Sahur, which tradition holds to be the site of the angels’ visitation to the shepherds the night Jesus was born. As we drove by a sign that said aptly “Shepherds Fields”, one of the professors leading our tour casually commented, “They say these are the same fields that Ruth gleaned.”

All of a sudden the story came alive. I could see Ruth in the fields, hands raw from the gleaning, back aching from the manual labor. I was also struck by the realization that the choice to announce the Jesus’ birth in these fields was a demonstration of God’s compassion for the marginalized. After all, many of the shepherds and the gleaners of Ruth’s time would have been at the bottom of the social and economic ladder.

Typically we only focus on Bethlehem at Christmas time. But this “little town” has big significance in the history of Israel.

- It was in Bethlehem that Judah’s tribe settled (remember Tamar?)
- It was to Bethlehem that Naomi returned with her daughter-in-law, Ruth
- It was in Bethlehem that Ruth and Boaz (who was a descendant of Rahab) married and had a son, Obed
- It was in Bethlehem that Obed raised a family, including a descendant who would become king (and who would marry Bathsheba)
- It was to Bethlehem that Joseph traveled with his expectant wife, Mary
- It was in Bethlehem that Jesus, the true King, was born
- It was in the fields of Bethlehem that angels appeared to announce Jesus’ birth to the shepherds

Something about this consistency of the geography in the biblical narrative brings me comfort. I think it's the idea that God doesn't give up on us, but keeps coming back to meet us in those places of need, giving us the opportunity to take our own place in the genealogy of the family of God.


*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." [Micah 5:2](#)*

## REFLECT

*Read the Book of Ruth in the [Message paraphrase](#). What impresses you about Ruth's story?*

*When she chose to walk with Naomi from Moab to Bethlehem, Ruth also chose to walk with Naomi's God and never looked back. What "compass adjustments" might you need to make in order to walk closer to God?*

*Ruth's courage and persistence was important to this story. Is there an area of your life where you need to be bolder for God's kingdom?*

 Lord, in this Advent season, may we have the single-minded faith of Ruth, who never turned back once she was on the road to Bethlehem.

## NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

[1] The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament | Ruth, p. 277.

[2] Ibid, p. 278. "Israel's law mandated provision for the poor and destitute by allowing them to follow the reapers in the fields to gather what was dropped or left behind. This solution to a social problem required that the recipients work hard for their provision, and it therefore preserved the dignity that is sometimes forfeited by those who are entirely dependent on the generosity of others."

[3] According to Leviticus 25:25, when a person became so poor that they had to sell or forfeit their property, a prosperous relative was to redeem or buy back the property for that family member. This person was called a "kinsman-redeemer". Apparently Naomi's late husband still owned property in Bethlehem, and so Ruth went beyond seeking just a marriage proposal to remind Boaz of his responsibilities as a kinsman-redeemer to Naomi.

[4] Nielsen, K. (1997). Ruth: A Commentary. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY.

[5] Eskenazi & Frymer-Kenski. The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth, pg. 96

[6] Ibid, pg. xlv

Rachel Held Evans has a fascinating comparison of Ruth and the Proverbs 31 woman in the book "[A Year of Biblical Womanhood](#)". There is also a [related post](#) on her blog.

There are several significant themes in Ruth that are not addressed in this advent devotional. For further study we highly recommend "[The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules](#)" by Carolyn Custis James.



## CHAPTER FOUR: BATHSHEBA

Ariel Price

Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth are notable in the genealogy of Christ recorded in Matthew 1 because they are women who took risks and acted righteously. They came with imperfect pasts, and God redeemed them. Like the other women, Bathsheba also has a troubled past. And Bathsheba also acts righteously, though it's a side of the story we don't hear enough about.

### BATHSHEBA'S STAIN

David's infamous mistreatment of Bathsheba follows quickly on the heels of his many successes. 2 Samuel 8:13 says, "And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt." In 2 Samuel 9, David takes in Mephibosheth, the crippled son of his friend Jonathan—which is one of my favorite stories of David.

In 2 Samuel 10, David soundly defeats the Syrians, whom the Ammonites had hired to help in their war against Israel. Without the help of the Syrians, the Ammonites are sitting ducks. So in 2 Samuel 11, though it was "the time when kings go out to battle," David decides to stay home.

It's no wonder David is a little prideful at this point. He feels invincible. So when he sees Bathsheba, he acts. He sends others to bring her to him—a brazen act that shows he was not trying to keep this a secret. "David sent his

messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her." (2 Samuel 11:4).

Opinions about Bathsheba tend to fall on a continuum between two extremes: 1) she was a temptress who seduced David, or 2) she was an innocent victim and David raped her. [1] Whether one considers her guilty or innocent, Bathsheba was not in an easy position, as the law and culture were both stacked against her. On the one hand, to lie with David means committing adultery. On the other hand, not lying with him means refusing the king. Both courses of action were punishable by death.

It's possible that everyone in that patriarchal society—even Uriah himself, if he knew about it—could have overlooked the incident, except for one thing: Bathsheba becomes pregnant.

Suddenly, David's foolishness is inescapable, and the person most at risk is Bathsheba. So David invites Uriah back from the war, and tries to get him to go home and sleep with his wife. This is the only way to protect David's reputation and Bathsheba's life. One commentary suggested that its possible Uriah knew or suspected David's true motive. Uriah refuses to go home, saying,

*"The ark and Israel and Judah swell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing."*

These words are a heap of judgment on David's head. They remind him that he is not out at the battle where he should be. He is relaxing at home, sleeping with other men's wives, while even God's ark is in a booth on the battlefield.

Uriah calls Joab, David's commander, "my lord." He will *not* go home to cover for David's sin, even for Bathsheba's sake. But whether or not Uriah knows about the affair and whether or not he intends to take action against David, he just made himself a serious threat to David's kingship.

This is no longer just about Bathsheba and the pregnancy. Uriah is out of David's control. So David puts the battle against the Ammonites at risk by sending Uriah and others too close to Rabbah, the city they were laying siege to. Uriah is killed in battle.

David tries to make it right by marrying Bathsheba, but the Bible says that “the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” God sends the prophet Nathan to rebuke him, even sending a prediction that the child will not live as a result of his sin (2 Samuel 12:14). David repents, but the prediction holds true.

## BATHSHEBA’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Eventually, Bathsheba has another son, Solomon, and the Bible tells us that “the Lord loved him” (2 Samuel 12:24). [2] We know from 1 Kings 1 that David promised that Solomon would be his heir. But when David is old and his house is in shambles, his son Adonijah tries to take over.

Once again, Bathsheba’s life is at risk. If Adonijah becomes king, Bathsheba will be viewed as an adulteress; neither she nor Solomon will be recognized as legitimate. Because Solomon has the Lord’s favor, the prophet Nathan knows that this will have implications not just for Bathsheba and Solomon, but for all of Israel as well. Rather than going to David himself, Nathan asks Bathsheba to intercede.

It’s clear that Bathsheba has a special authority to intervene in such a way. And though she does not know that Solomon’s reign will be the most peaceful and prosperous time of Israel’s history, and she does not know that the Savior of the world will be born through Solomon’s line, she goes to the king.

*“My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying, “Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.” And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it...And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.” [1 Kings 1:17](#)*

Nathan enters and confirms what Bathsheba has said. But David doesn’t tell Nathan right away that he will make Solomon the king. He calls Bathsheba back, and she is the first to know.


Bathsheba’s action saves her life and makes Solomon king, ensuring God’s favor on Israel. As a result, David’s line is continued through Solomon to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus (Matthew 1:6).

## REFLECT

*Read the story of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel, Chapters 11, 12.*

*Where do you see God's grace for Bathsheba in this story? Where do you need God's grace in your life this week?*

*It is likely that at some point we have all been grievously wronged by someone in power. Pray for God's healing from situations that have left you wounded.*

 Lord, in this Advent season, may we grieve with those who have been wronged by the misuse of power as we pray and wait for your justice to reign on earth.



## NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

[1] Davidson, R. [Did King David Rape Bathsheba? A Case Study in Narrative](#) Presenting eighteen lines of evidence from the biblical narrative, Old Testament scholar Richard M. Davidson makes a powerful case that Bathsheba was the victim of an abuse of power rather than a willing participant in adultery.

While not the easiest essay to stomach in light of the Advent season, it is important to recognize that Bathsheba is consistently characterized in a positive way in the bible. Davidson notes "The narrative concerning Bathsheba and King David represents an indictment directed solely against the man and not the woman, against David and all men in positions of power (whether civil or ecclesiastical or academic) who take advantage of their "power" and victimize women sexually." p. 95.

[2] Bathsheba had four more sons with David (Solomon, Shimea, Shobab, and Nathan) and two of them are listed in New Testament genealogies. Joseph, Jesus's earthly father, was a descendant of Solomon (see Matthew 1:6) and his mother, Mary, was a descendant of Nathan (see Luke 3:31).

More reading on Bathsheba:

Garland & Garland. [Bathsheba's Story: Surviving Abuse and Loss](#). This excerpt from "Flawed Families of the Bible: How God's Grace Works through Imperfect Relationships" explores the dynamics of survival and the abuse of power in the story of Bathsheba and David.

Mowczko, M. [A Sympathetic Look at Bathsheba](#). Here you will find a more detailed look at the story of David and Bathsheba, including a discussion of the circumstances around Bathsheba's bathing, the confrontation of David by the Nathan the prophet, and "the rest of the story", i.e. Bathsheba's later intervention to protect the throne of Solomon.



## CHAPTER FIVE: MARY OF NAZARETH

Roberta Mosier-Peterson

Being nurtured in a Wesleyan Holiness tradition, I have not always had a deep appreciation for Mary of Nazareth. Protestants in our world may neglect, either intentionally or unintentionally, the most obvious and powerful example of Jesus treasuring women: his mother.

The gospel writers depict Mary in various ways, with the author of the Gospel of Luke providing the most insight. In [Luke 1:28-30](#) the angel Gabriel approaches the young virgin with these words:

*"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus."*

The incarnation is mysterious in mechanics, but the reality of it is crucial for theology. God chooses to speak with women. God chooses and favors women for crucial tasks and at crucial times.[1] it is directly stated in the bible that Mary is intentionally chosen and given a grand task that includes, but also extends beyond, childbearing.

Mary has been commissioned to bring Jesus into the world, of whom the angel later says "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High,

and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" ([Luke 1:32-33](#)).

She does not raise any objections, but asks one clarifying question: "how?" (1:34). The final words from the Angel's mouth could serve as a summary for this story as well as for the greater Story: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37). Mary is satisfied. She replies in willingness and humility with the words "here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (1:38).

She becomes what Eastern Orthodox Church leaders call *theotokos*, God-bearer. [2] At the very least, God's choice of Mary convinces us that women can be used in God's purposes. In the incarnation God shows humanity that restoration is begotten of a woman and therefore she is first in line to see the availability of the Kingdom of God. The fall that enacted her alienation is now reversed and enacts her liberation.

In recent weeks, I have been reading many early writings about Mary as God-bearer, and am increasingly convinced that her life and obedience offer abundant resources. The church needs a deeper theology of women and it is imperative that both genders work together toward that end. In fact, the whole story of redemption demands it.

If it is indeed true that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" ([2 Corinthians 5:19](#)) then it stands to reason that Mary's "yes" and the hospitality of her womb became the fertile ground from which redemption would be birthed. Perhaps, God is free to bring about redemption by whatever means suits God's purposes. God invited and put confidence in Mary, a young woman, to collaborate in the process of reconciliation.

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar suggests that we view the womb of Mary as the birthplace of the church. It is the womb of Mary, what von Balthasar calls "the room at Nazareth", which serves as the fertile ground of the church of Christ.[3] It is there that the church, catholic, is founded. The "creaturely counterpart to the infinitely self-bestowing love of God" was the womb of a woman.[4] A self-less, life-giving extension of hospitality offered the bodily necessary space and nourishment for the full expression of God-with-us to be born.

While metaphors fall short of painting a full picture of the church, scripture often speaks of the church as the body of Christ. God came to us with a flesh and blood body. The incarnation of God in the world today is accomplished through the flesh and blood bodies of the body of Christ, the Church. God's love seeks embodiment. Flesh and blood has always been represented by both female and male.

The church, the body of Christ, serves as the space and nourishment (the womb) in order to give birth to new and eternal life. The life that comes forth is not of human conception; God does it with the cooperation and participation of humans. This particular metaphor of church as *theotokos*, God-bearer, is feminine. The God-bearing church in the world will be one that emphasizes careful listening, waiting, and discerning.[5]


On any given day we may face situations where we feel dismissed and devalued by others. In these moments, we are invited to be both bold and humble. It is our turn to pay close attention to those around us who so desperately need the message and reality of God-with-us.

Mary and her obedient God-bearing reminds us that God brings forth beauty and new life when we say "yes" to those tasks and situations in daily life that seem impossible when done on our own and in our own strength.

## REFLECT

Read [Luke 1](#), paying close attention to the "Magnificat" in verses 46-55. What impresses you about Mary's response?

*"The God-bearing church will be one that emphasizes careful listening, waiting, and discerning." Spend some time reflecting on your own role as part of the "God-bearing church".*

 Lord, as this Advent season comes to an end, may we, like Mary, embody Christ and be faithful God-bearers to those around us.

## NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

[1] See Kristina LeCelle-Peterson, *Liberating Tradition: Women's Identity and Vocation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, Kindle Edition, 2008) for discussion with good humor points. She points out that "at this crucial juncture, the impending birth of the most significant person ever born, God does not use a 'man as spiritual head of the house' model, such as many Christians teach as God's way of doing things. And you think God would want to do it right at the birth of the one and only Son of God," Location 945.

[2] See Cyril of Alexandria, "On the Incarnation" and John of Damascus, "On the Incarnation and Icons," *Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 143-151.

[3] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Kehl and Loser, (New York: Crossroads), 214.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville, TN: UpperRoom Books, 1998), for a thorough treatment of the "art" of Godbearing in the context of youth ministry; however it has broader implications as well.

More reading on Mary and the concept of "theotokos":

[Mary, the Mother of God](#) by Rachel Held Evans

[The Most Familiar Story](#) by Sarah E. Dahl

## AFTERWORD

Adele Hebert

As we have seen, in Matthew's gospel, four women from the Old Testament are included in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus. They are not the well-known matriarchs, but foreigners who were often ostracized and oppressed by society. Although these women display bold unconventional behavior, their outstanding acts of faith and courage are all but forgotten. Over time, these for women were all given scandalous reputations, through religion and art. Sadly, these reputations have followed them through the ages.

In reality, the four Old Testament women in the genealogy of Jesus were very instrumental at strategic times during the history of Israel. Tamar is linked with Judah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Rahab enabled Joshua to gain entrance to the Promised Land; and she was an ancestor of Boaz. Ruth married Boaz, and was the great grandmother of Israel's first King - David. Bathsheba married David; Nathan the prophet relied on Queen Bathsheba to save her son Solomon's throne and the entire nation.

Something remarkable about these women has often been overlooked. Trusting God and standing on the laws and promises made to them by men, each woman made a verbal contract; a transaction for her future, regarding her children and place in history. They were proactive and assertive, even initiating and determining the conditions of those contracts. Tamar made Judah promise to pay her for her services. Rahab made the spies promise to rescue her and her family. Ruth made Boaz promise to marry her. Queen Bathsheba made David promise that Solomon would be the next king.

These women had extreme faith which gave them the power to speak out. Abandoned and alone, they often had nothing to rely on but their faith. Knowing the dangers, they often put themselves in frightening situations; risking their lives and reputations. Through these faithful women, families were restored and the Israelite nation was saved more than once.

The five women featured in this devotional were central to God's plan of salvation. In a very real way, they were types of saviors. Tamar gave birth to twins; she saved the tribe of Judah. Rahab saved the spies, then she saved her whole family; she begins the Conquest of Canaan. Ruth saved her

widowed mother-in-law; then gave birth to Obed, grandfather to King David. Queen Bathsheba gave birth to Solomon and saved his life, his throne, and her nation. Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Each of these courageous women played a part in bringing about God's plan of salvation and was deemed worthy of being included in Jesus' family tree. It is fitting to remember them during the Advent season, but even more so to reflect on what they can teach us throughout the year. Our prayer is that this brief devotional will entice you to "re-read" the women of the bible and that you will discover the richness of their stories over this next year.



MERRY CHRISTMAS!

## CONTRIBUTORS

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## ABOUT THE JUNIA PROJECT

The Junia Project is a volunteer community of women and men advocating for the inclusion of women in leadership in the Christian church and for mutuality in marriage. We believe that when interpreted correctly, the Bible teaches that both men and women are called to serve at all levels of the Church, and that leadership should be based on gifting and not on gender.

### JOIN OUR COMMUNITY!

We invite you to [CLICK HERE](#) to join our community and receive notifications of new posts, resources, and updates.

### OUR MISSION

- To encourage the study of egalitarian theology within a supportive online community
- To advocate for the inclusion of women at all levels of leadership in the Church
- To let women know that God loves them deeply and intends for them to be equal participants in the faith community
- To encourage men to advocate for women and to work alongside them in Kingdom work
- To provide resources on women in the Bible to enrich church teaching

### THE BLOG

The Junia Project blog serves as a platform for volunteer advocates to write about their understanding of egalitarian theology and to share reflections and stories about gender equality.

