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| Do not be afraidThis column hasIndication of which slide to move toBlank screenBathshebaRuthRahabTamarMary, Joseph conversation“My eyes”“Yes Son”Matt: 1DNAAngel4 womenEmmanuel | SermonThe gospel of Matthew starts off with what is regarded as the most boring of passages in the Bible. Probably why we didn’t read it and started at V 18There’s lots of *begatting* in the KJV which usually means ‘fathering’. This bloke fathered this other bloke. But there are some exceptions. There are 5 women mentioned and the last one is Mary who became the mother of Jesus. Another point is, of course, to give authority to the fact that Jesus has ancestors in the patriarch, Abraham, and King David.Now if you want a saucy sermon you have come to the right place. Matthew Chapter 1 leads us right into it. In the list of the first 17 verses (not read)* There was Bathsheba. King David used his power to kill Uriah to take this beautiful wife.
* Ruth seduced Boaz on the threshing floor at night to ensure her family’s survival.
* Rahab – a prostitute and
* Tamar, in Genesis, who pretended to be one.

Why were these 4 earlier women mentioned when we really only need the male line? We’ll come back there.So Mary tells Joseph that she is pregnant. Can you imagine the discussion?Let’s take into account the beliefs 2000 years ago in ancient Israel about babies. Ancient Hebrew birds and bees. Although people could often see likenesses in a child to the mother it was believed that the mother was like a fertile field and the father implanted his seed. So the baby was of the father, just as a plant grows true to the seed. We now understand genetics and conception and know that each gamete has ½ the chromosomes that on fertilisation makes the new individual. Why tell you this?It’s important in this case because Joseph would not regard himself as a father. He would be an adoptive father if the message of the angel were true. It’s important because the implication is that this is a case of ‘conceived by the Holy Spirit’. Therefore, the child would take on the attributes of the Holy Spirit.He now has some decisions to make and things to weigh up. Remember he is a righteous man. ***Righteous***means doing what is right. It’s about the same in its original meaning as ***Just*** from which we get Justice. *based on or behaving according to what is morally right and fair.* Weigh up what:* The passage mentions exposing Mary to public disgrace.
* If deserted by Joseph Mary would be probably unmarriable and if she survived the child would be brought up in conditions where the mother is poor, powerless or in prostitution or all three.
* Joseph could still be blamed for fathering the child and also be ostracised in his own community. Of course, even apart from the sense of hurt and betrayal he would be feeling, Joseph had his own reputation to think of, and sticking with Mary was a no win for him. If it became known that his girl was carrying someone else’s child, he’d be humiliated, and if it was thought that the child was his, his reputation as a respectable and honourable young man was shot since they weren’t married yet. Pre-marital sex might not cause much angst nowadays, but it sure did then. Either way, he loses.
* Just this week Pam and I heard 2 modern discussions that are relevant to this historical conception.
	+ Christian Palestinian women discussion the severe social repercussions to the family of having a child born out of wedlock.
	+ Protestors in Iran, male and female, who are taken by Morality Police and security forces who are sexually abused in prison. It is so shameful to them that the suicide soon after.

So the social norms of the time require Joseph to desert Mary in her predicament. The angel is giving him more information but he’s the only one with this information. Society would still condemn. Who’s going to believe him – DNA testing wasn’t around for another 1,800 years. Joseph doesn’t make the right choice, or righteous choice in this case. He makes the loving choice. He believes the Angel and will support Mary and the baby through the birth and as he can for the rest of their lives.One of the most damaging views of Christianity is that it is about how to behave morally according to set rules. ***Jesus died for you, Now Behave***. Gay people, people with habits or addictions, the poor or abused have felt left out as they can’t meet the standards. How quickly we forget that we all can’t meet the standards.Back to the 4 women in the lineage.Note that these are not the heroic virtuous women. They all have Gentile connections. These women are also all associated with sexual activity some of which is highly controversial.The value of a woman is not her virginity but her being a person. The other 4 women. Maybe that’s the point of including them in the genealogy.The birth narratives are not really about the baby Jesus, Joseph or Mary; they are about the Jesus whom we see in ministry and crucified under the banner ‘King of the Jews’. This passage ends with a namegiving. This is the point of the namegiving – Jesus = God saves and Emmanuel – God with us.And finishing with a quote from Bill Loader on this passage.The Christmas stories always need connecting with the grown up Jesus if they are not to be sentimentalised. Don’t put tinsel around the cross at Christmas. The magic of angels and the virginal conception are the embellishments to enable us to celebrate that life of compassion and self-giving. In their own way they give us the radical message of inclusiveness: of the women, of the Gentiles, of the sexually suspected, of the pregnant girl. They lay before us the violence which grace confronts: the all maleness, the righteous Law observance, the willingness to abandon the pregnant girl, the murderous ruler, the slaughtered children, the aspiration to kill ‘the king of the Jews’. We have to work hard to keep it all from being reduced to jingles to promote shopping sprees or being perpetuated as just a bit more Christian naiveté in a world where the same geography and the same issues exist. |