

I come from a right weird family tree (you won't be surprised to learn!): Pompey people, Jocks, Jews, bakers, businessmen, murderers, matelots, artists, artisans - even a relative who survived Titanic and another who was the first driver of the first Flying Scotsman! So it is for all of us; there can't be a family in the land which doesn't have its renegades and its righteous. What about Jesus' ancestry? Well, there are some there, too, who make for an interesting family line-up: patriarchs, shepherds, monarchs, paupers, priests, prostitutes, soldiers, adulterers, murderers, farmers.

The two accounts of the Christmas story - in the gospels of Matthew (1.16) and Luke (3.23) - oddly, both start with a reckoning of what Jesus' family credentials were. The line in Matthew (initially written for a Jewish audience) goes back to Abraham, the one called to found a special people for God. This cements Jesus' place in the life and history of the Jewish people. The line in Luke (initially written for a gentile audience) goes back all the way to Adam, then to God; Jesus' lineage therefore common to all mankind. Both these genealogies have many more odd features, but let's get back to the season in hand.

All I want to do for now is think of this one babe lying in a manger. All that potential - to be what? Inherit the lesser ways of some of his forbears? How about using what he was born with, his potential. A healer? A miracle worker? A teacher? A leader? Strange, however, that this little babe would not fulfill his potential until his death on a cross. Saviour.

Anyway, that's for Holy Week and Easter. For now, as I said, think of this one babe lying in a manger. Such potential; the original Christmas present to Jesus.

What are we doing with this Christmas potential, then? If you're reading this, you're not dead, so you haven't finished reaching your potential either. This month look on the babe in the manger and remember that we were once like that, too. Never mind what's gone before, we still have time to be like him yet.