



FAR & NEAR

FOURTH QUARTER 2021

OUR VISION

CHRIST'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE IN HEALTHCARE AND THE NATION THROUGH CHRIST-CENTERED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS.

Chairman's Letter



Come December and most of us are busy with Christmas activities. If we pause and ask ourselves this question, "What is the essence of Christmas?", we may come up with a variety of valid thoughts.

The Bible, while describing this greatest event in history through the Gospel writers, gives an important message, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14).

The Word did not become words. The Word became flesh. Former Archbishop William Temple said "There are just two types of religion. The one type tries to meet God at the top rung of a long ladder; the other meets God at the lowest rung." The message of Christmas is this: Jesus, the Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev. 17:14) comes down the ladder to us and meets us on the lowest rung and meets us where we are, to reveal God to us to show us just how much God loves us.

He did not just establish a way of life. As the Son of Man, He confronts the sons and daughters of men with God's offer to humankind. He himself is the offer. He himself is the gospel, the good news. He came that we might have a gospel to share.

The Bible says that He dwelt among us. Jesus really lived among us. He shared our difficulties, our temptations and our daily stresses and yet was full of grace and truth. He invites us to be like Him.

One of the temptations of the founders of a mission hospital in a rural area was to stay in the nearby town and reach out to the villagers. Though this was the advice given by well-meaning friends, they decided to reject the "mission bungalow" model and chose to make their dwelling among the villagers, sharing their difficulties and limited facilities.

May the divine incarnation pervade our lives and may it prompt us to share the gospel in the way He did - by reaching down the ladder, by dwelling among our people, full of grace and truth.

Susheel Tharien

A blurred background image of a nativity scene, showing a manger with straw and a white cloth, set against a warm, golden light.

WISHING YOU A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR

Highlights from the Staff



KT PAUL: COORDINATOR - NORTH INDIA

I am grateful to God for using me for His purposes in the past 25 years with EMFI. Some years back in December 1993 it was a challenge to leave Helen with high fever, obeying the GENTLE VOICE that said "Go I will take care of her". Till date the GENTLE SHEPHERD (Genesis 48:15) has never let us down. Surgeries or illnesses forced me to rest whenever I was exhausted. I am grateful to God for Helen's quiet contribution in every way. I have been blessed by the role models within the family of EMFI who have loved, inspired, encouraged, supported and sustained me through the journey. I have grown in Christ and changed and continue to do so. I am privileged to be used as family to invest in individuals and families. I covet your prayers for grace to go on as the journey gets tougher with health issues.

Since October, I visited fellowships at Kanpur, Lucknow, Agra, Udaipur, Ajmeer, Meerut, Jodhpur and Kota and its been a joy to see the students personally ministered and blessed. Pray for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to minister to the students and graduates in future and for wisdom and protection in all situations.

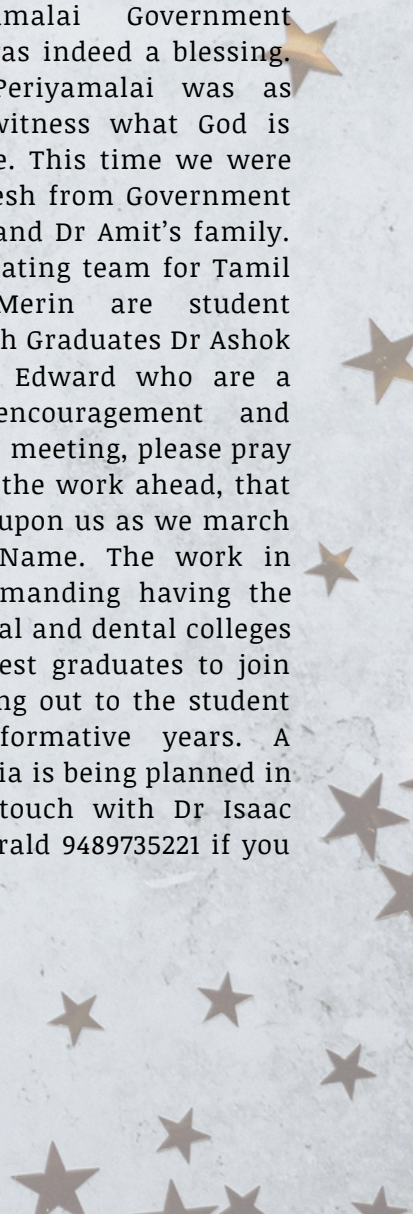
I need much grace to go on with my physical limitations as it is getting tough as the days go by. Pray also that the Lords chosen ones would join the staff team as the need in the north is great. Love and seasons greetings from us as family.

SOLOMON RAJU: FIELD PARTNER - ANDHRA PRADESH & TELENGANA

Solomon visited college fellowships that have begun to meet physically and has been able to spend time with the students in prayer and encouraging them in their walk with the Lord. He could visit the fellowships at Hyderabad, Nizamabad, Ongole and Nandayal. He was part of the Zonal retreat held at Hyderabad in November where 120 students attended and many graduates were also involved and he could spend time interacting with and encouraging them. Apart from these visits, he continues to attend many of the fellowships that meet virtually and also interacts with many students over the phone encouraging and praying for them. Solomon could attend the Christmas celebration organised by the Nandayal fellowship in November.

HERALD ADELAIDE & ELIZABETH ELLIOT: TAMIL NADU

God has been faithfully answering our prayers for Tamil Nadu. Every night during the weekdays from 9.30pm to 10pm some of us meet together online, praying for the revival in Chennai colleges. We have an online EMFI graduates Bible study co-ordinated by Dr Jacintha and one for the students of Chennai fellowship on Sundays. Christmas programs are happening in different medical and dental colleges of Tamil Nadu. For some of them we help out arranging logistics, speaker etc. On the 5th of December we had a one-day retreat for the Medical College students from CMC, Government Medical College, Vellore and Thiruvannamalai Medical College on the topic "Remember your creator in the days of your youth" at Pravaham retreat centre. There were 60 of us including graduates whose presence was an encouragement to all. Dr Samuel Siddartha, Drs Isaac and Prasanna were our main facilitators. Four students could also join us from Thiruvannamalai Government Medical College which was indeed a blessing. A two day visit to Periyamalai was as refreshing as ever to witness what God is doing through his people. This time we were accompanied by Bhuvanesh from Government Medical College, Vellore and Dr Amit's family. We have a small coordinating team for Tamil Nadu. Jeneeta and Merin are student representatives along with Graduates Dr Ashok Bhaskar and Dr Shanti Edward who are a constant source of encouragement and guidance. As we continue meeting, please pray for the coming year and the work ahead, that the Lord's favour will be upon us as we march ahead in His glorious Name. The work in Tamil Nadu is quite demanding having the highest number of medical and dental colleges in the country. We request graduates to join hands with us in reaching out to the student community in their formative years. A mission trip to North India is being planned in January. Please get in touch with Dr Isaac Jebaraj 9600899255 or Herald 9489735221 if you are considering the visit.



Highlights from the Staff

MV RAO: FIELD PARTNER - ANDHRA PRADESH & TELENGANA

Who being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped - Philippians 2:6

Amid the un-heard, hungry, vehement cries, suppression of the truth & oppression of the poor - Indulgence took its place everywhere. Slothfulness crept into the youth; A reluctant attitude towards fellowships; sensuality and pleasure has become a lifestyle. Being broken to the core; not having strength to seek the truth or mercy; the teens are dwindling in hope. Who will think of them? Redeemed ones are restless in pursuing their own interests but not of Christ. The cry of Him (Christ) is not being heard in the noisy streets, neither the pitiable state of these destitute medicos who are aimlessly running with the winds of time. There are many invisible forces with their cunning craftiness, entangling these lives either through depression or in the pursuit for successful careers. There is no one who watches over the students - not even one. There are 65 medical colleges and 28 dental colleges in AP & TS, of which six are Muslim minority colleges - where we have not laid any inroads for fellowship. There are 12,930 UG students joining in these colleges every year. There are about 15,000 graduates passing out from these colleges but we do not know where they go. We have Christmas programs in less than 50% of the colleges to proclaim the gospel. But no follow up to lead them to Christ. Few fellowship retreats, two evangelistic camps but wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction. As Jesus prayed - *"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."* To this end we could form a prayer line each morning and are able to find rare fruits in AP & TS. The unconquered land is huge. May the Lord grant us at least 100 open homes so that each batch may have at least one boy and a girl student leader in every college.

LINU ZACHARIAH: FIELD PARTNER - TAMIL NADU

Linu could visit college fellowships and graduates at Coimbatore, Salem, Madurai, Titucorin and Tirunelveli. He attended the Christmas program at Salem and will be attending more such programs at Trichy and Madurai. Linu writes, "The major challenges that we find after the COVID time is that the fellowships which started to meet physically have now gone back to online meetings in some places because students have tested positive in the fellowships. Please pray that these fellowships will become more regular and consistent. There are some fellowships struggling to find a suitable place for them to meet together. I have also noticed that the students are losing interest in going to mission hospitals. Another major challenge that we face is the lack of graduate involvement in most of the places because of which students call people of their choice to speak in their fellowships which has resulted in confusions and conflicts."

ANUP KUMAR RANA: FIELD PARTNER - ODISHA & WEST BENGAL

Anup writes, "I give thanks to our almighty God for his grace, mercy, love, goodness and kindness upon me, my family and ministry. I have not been able to reach out to many during this pandemic time. But now, I am able to travel and meet with students and graduates. I am able to conduct some fellowships in West Bengal and Odisha over the virtual platform zoom by God's grace and I am also gaining some new contacts in the colleges of West Bengal. When I speak to the students and graduates I get more information and contacts and I am able to see the Lord granting new inroads to the work in Odisha and West Bengal. I send you my wishes during this season and pray that joy and peace would enter each and every home during this Christmas Season."



Highlights from the Staff



CHANDY ISSAC: ASSOCIATE STAFF - KARNATAKA

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship...and to prayer.”

Acts 2:42

We praise God for enabling us to continue the Bangalore fellowship with the weekly Bible Studies using the series on ‘Confident Christianity’. It is heartening to see the initiatives taken by a few graduates and interns viz. Dr Grace (BBH), Dr Sunitha (ADC), Hudson, Joel and Bejoi to lead these studies very faithfully. We have also had the Karnataka monthly meetings both in October and November on the topics of **‘Mental Health: staying sane during exams’** by Dr Jamila Koshy and **‘Whole Person Medicine’** by Dr Sunil Abraham respectively. Dr Sunita Bidari, did a great job of coordinating with the speakers for these meetings.

The great need in all the different college fellowships is to see more of the 3rd and 4th year students taking over the baton of responsibility for their respective colleges. God, in His mercy has led us to move in this direction as we often meet to pray and work along these lines. Our General Secretary, Dr Samuel Siddhartha, had personally visited students and interns of a few colleges of Kolar, Hoskote and Bangalore, and was in touch with Dr Silas (BBH) and his wife, Dr Melba (ETCM Hospital, Kolar). During his visit to the Bangalore Baptist Hospital, one evening i.e. October 15th, a few graduates got together with him and prayed for the needs of Karnataka. It seemed good to all of us to work towards having a Retreat away from Bangalore and Dr Samuel Sidhartha suggested that ETCM Hospital, Kolar can be the venue. Then we saw the two interns, Hudson and Bejoi, meeting often to discuss and pray over all the plans, people and purpose of holding the 1st major Retreat in Karnataka outside Bangalore on November 28th, 2021. So almost every other day we would meet, just like it says in Acts 2:46 - *“Day after day they met as a group...”*, to work out the program, publicity and how participants can get to the place for the Retreat. Let us praise God for the 29 participants who joined us at CROSSROADS, Kolar from 5 different medical and dental colleges. Please pray that each of them would grow up to be Christ-centered medical and dental professionals who will bring Christ’s transforming presence in health care and for the blessing our nation.

Crossroads

Verticals, Horizontals and the road ahead: CROSSROADS, A one day retreat held at ETCM Hospital, Kolar on 28th November 2021. The speakers - Dr Sam Siddharth, Dr Naveen Thomas and Dr Melba - dealt with different aspects viz. our relationship with God, our responsibilities as students and doctors towards one another and patients as well as the presentation on Medical Missions. We had two messages, followed by group discussions, Q&A sessions, lively group activities and meaningful times of praise and worship. We received excellent support from Dr Silas (BBH), Dr Johnson Kunder, the administrator of ETCM Hospital and Dr Shyam Sundar (BBH) who coordinated important details of the retreat, though he could not join us due to a bereavement in the family.



Testimony

THROUGH THE STORM

I praise the Lord for His mercy, love and guidance. Last year my dad met with a major car accident. The doctor who examined him said that my dad had serious complications and that I should be prepared for the worst. I did not inform his condition to any of my family members but informed my prayer group and started praying for my dad. Within 2 hours they called me to say that his vitals are improving, but before we could be happy about it came the news that he had a compression fracture of his thoracic vertebra which had caused compression over his spinal cord and he had lost all his sensations and motor power right from his abdomen downwards. The doctors said that the probability of him walking again is very low even after surgery and that he needed several months of rehabilitation. I have always seen my dad as a very active person who does all his work by himself. But now he was lying in front of me not even able to sit up by himself and needed my assistance to do everything. There was only one thing in my mind, I did not want to question God asking why this happened because He does not make mistakes and He does everything with a purpose. I only asked God for His wisdom and his strength to get me and my family through this storm. There were lots of problems and confusions regarding my dad's surgery and the place we needed to shift him to for his rehabilitation. God did everything for us in ways we could not even imagine. He showed us the right place for dad's surgery and made us get admission for rehabilitation in CMC Vellore. After 6 months of rehabilitation, now my dad is able to do most of his work by himself and also started going to his office using a wheelchair. Life is not the same for us and even now we are praying in faith that God would do a miracle and make my dad walk again. But through all these hard times we have understood that sometimes we have to face some storms in our life that we can't handle. But in everything we can see that God is faithful and He always makes a way for us to overcome and be a living testimony to proclaim the faithfulness of God.

J.Kathrina, M.B.B.S

Saveetha Medical college

FAITHFUL GOD

I thank God for giving me this opportunity to testify of the wondrous deeds He has done in my life. My parents are first generation believers in my entire family and God has always been faithful. He blessed me with a good rank in my entrance exam for medical school, after which I did my MBBS from Osmania Medical College, Hyderabad. Here I came to know the Lord more deeply and began to have an intimate relationship with my creator.

I always used to say to myself that I should work hard, study well and aim higher. But once I knew the Lord, the same selfish desire which actually stressed me out at times, turned out to a meaningful purpose. I came to know that God had some amazing and unfathomable plans for my future and had placed me in medical school for a purpose, and I actually started to love what I was doing and worked with my full effort to glorify His name.

As most of us know, the preparation phase for post graduation is really tough. And though there were many failures and disappointments during this time, God used to strengthen me with His word. God never failed to amaze me as I depended on Him at every step of my life. By His grace I secured the 18th rank in the All India ranking and **1st rank in the Telangana state in the NEET PG 2021**. I had not imagined this even in my wildest dreams! God always equips us when He calls us to do something. It is up to us to use the talents that God has given us.

I thank my parents for all their prayers and sacrifices. I thank my well wishers and the family of fellowship members for all the encouragement, guidance and prayer support. All glory, honour, praise to our loving saviour Jesus Christ.

Charitha Nimishakavi



Download

A One Day Retreat for Medicos of Chennai

We were able to restart the DOWNLOAD (a one day retreat on basic biblical doctrines for medical students in and around Chennai) in October, held at Kalyani hospital. We had representation from 20 medical and dental colleges out of the 40 in and around Chennai. Being a Sunday, Dr Isaac Jebaraj shared a short devotion on 'True Worship'. Dr Deepak Abraham spoke on 'Taking Root and Bearing Fruit'. This was followed by an intensive question and answer time.

TN Team

It was really a blessing to be a part of the Download retreat conducted by EMFI. It was an eye opener for me to realise what it really means to be a Christian Doctor - to set our mind right and stand for it during the time of testing and not run a rat race which the society demands from us. Dr Isaac Jebaraj who focused on worship made us question ourselves - 'Is worship to please God or is it just to show the outside world that we worship?'

Dr Deepak Abraham talked about Growing Roots and Bearing Fruits through different analogies pointing towards a Christian life God desires in us and not to emphasise on what we desire to do. He emphasised on 'The Being Habits' and 'The Doing Habits' which transforms us from the inside out. God needs to work in us to help us not to just survive but to be helpful and an inspiration for others to grow besides us. The sequence of Sin 'Temptation starts with a Thought - An action is done - A habit is formed - Death follows' really spoke to me.

The Practical talk session was a much needed motivation for us students who face a lot of uncertainties in today's world.

I would like to thank all the organisers for conducting such a beautiful program.

Rabinson R

Stanley Medical College



Ground Realities - Where the tyre hits the road

On Call for Missions Anytime

A mega surgical camp was planned from the 18th to the 21st of November 2021, at Periamalia SMART Health centre, Tamil Nadu, with a massive number of patients. About 45 patients were waiting for major surgeries. It was amazing to be a part of the team that comprised of more than ten surgeons including Post Graduates and 2 Anaesthetists.

Initially reaching the place Periyamalai, which is part of the mountainous Ghats section, uphill from Krishnagiri was a big challenge. It was pouring cats and dogs on the day when we started from Vellore. The roads were flooded and visibility was low as we went uphill. So we were given a place to stay in Denginikottai at a beautiful farm house. Then the next day we travelled towards our destination while visibility was still low. Yet by God's grace we reached the place in spite of the landslides and fog on our way.

Dr Jeyachandaran had organized this Surgical camp in SMART (Samaritan mini-health centre). It is a lovely place. We had to operate on almost 45 patients in 3 days. More than 15 Surgical doctors from various specialities were part of the operating team like Urologist, Gynaecologist, Paediatric surgeon, General surgeon, Laparoscopic surgeon and even postgraduate students and Heads of Departments. However, we were just 2 Anaesthetists and 2 postgraduate students available.

Each day started at 9am and ended at 2am of the next day. It is clearly evident of the need of Anaesthetists in such remote areas. Even if someone is available to spend one day in this camp, it would be great for these people in unreached places. To my pleasant surprise my birthday was celebrated with a lot of love and a handcrafted cake by all. This place is an area of great need! Even if a surgeon or Anaesthetist can go for a day, it would be helpful. Dr Jeyachandaran is 78yrs old and has undergone a bypass surgery and is unable to perform surgeries by himself on the large number of patients awaiting surgery .

Serving the Lord anytime in missions needs an open mind and a willing heart to serve people in dire need. Some of us might not be able to work in such areas but we can always spare time like one or two days or even a week to serve in such places.

So why not plan your next vacation with your family or friends to places like Periyamalai that is full of natural beauty and needy patients? So do God's work anytime even if you are busy or even if it means for just one day.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed."* Luke 4:18,19

Dr. Freeda

Anaesthesia faculty, Government Medical college, Vellore.
(writing from GEMS hospital, Bihar where she is with another three surgeons for the next camp).



Asha Kiran Hospital, Odisha - An urgent Request

We need your urgent and sustained prayers for Asha Kiran Society in southern Odisha. The Asha Kiran Hospital has by God's grace continued working for 30 years to see "Just and compassionate communities, choosing and celebrating life." Over the past 6 weeks we find ourselves in a deep crisis. For months we worked on renewing our blood bank license and general hospital licenses. 2 months ago, an inspection of our blood bank found some errors and it was shut down. Then at a surgical camp, a young boy we operated on developed renal failure and died before he could reach a higher centre. His death led to a case being filed against us and medical authorities conducting an investigation. Though we were not found wanting in the surgical case, the authorities told us not to do any emergency maternity services as we do not have a registered obstetrician. We were also told to stop ultrasound services for the same reason. In the meantime, the local media published multiple stories saying that Asha Kiran Hospital stole the kidneys of the boy - and that the government has shut our hospital down.

Needless to say we are in a deep crisis. We have hardly any patients in our wards or OPD – in contrast to the usual bustle. High risk deliveries are not being cared for. People with long-term Sickle-cell disease are not coming. The whole spectrum of our care has been affected.

Pray for a just resolution to the authorities escalation in demands for specialists to do the same life-saving work we did for years. Ask the Lord to bring new medical team-members who have trained in obstetrics, anaesthesia and radiology. Pray that God cleanses us with His Spirit and give us unity and joy in these challenging days.

As I write this we have received news that our hospital license has been renewed with the permission to conduct caesarean and other operations. This is fantastic news as the permission is on the basis of 2 doctors having Family Medicine degrees and their training during the course to conduct Caesarean operations being recognised. This hopefully will set a precedent for other mission hospitals without a gynaecologist to follow.

We still need prayer for the blood bank inspection which is going to happen in a few days and the acceptance of Dr Ravi to appear for the ultrasound competency based test to restart vital ultrasounds.

Shoba George

Movements

- Drs Varghese Philip & Nirmala have moved from Timor Liste to CF Hospital, Oddanchaatram
- Dr Sneha has moved from Bangalore to the dental department of CF Hospital, Oddanchatram
- Dr Sunadhar moved from Kilpauk Medical College to Asha Kiran hospital, Lamtaput, Orissa
- Dr Jacinth Preethi moved from Madras Medical College to Ariyalur Medical College
- Dr Maggie who completed her dentistry from Asan Dental College has joined the newly established Dental clinic at TLM Hospital in Kalaikurichi, Tamil Nadu

Family News

- **Congratulations** to Dr Jacinth and Dr Bijin Oliver who won the 3rd price in the BIBLIA 2021 online bible quiz conducted by the Hindustan University/Group of Institutions. It was an online quiz conducted on the book of Judges, Gospel of Luke and the entire bible in general. We as the EMFI family are really proud of this accomplishment and wish them well.

New Arrival

- Dr Sheena and Dr Gnanaraj (Raxaul) were blessed with a baby boy on the 11th of October



Treasurer's note

Dear Friends and Partners,
Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We thank God for enabling EMFI to be a channel of blessing to many Medical & Dental professionals across the country. Thank you for taking part in HIS work all through this year, which enabled us to extend our areas of influence.

Financial Update

Month	Income	Expense
September	7,56,787	7,08,294
October	8,54,869	8,24,913
November	6,57,296	7,78,199

As we come to the fag end of the year, we thank God for sustaining us all through this year. Yes, we agree it wasn't easy for many of us with so much suffering and loss due to the pandemic. But then our Lord has been gracious and seen us through this year by His provision and ever-abiding presence.

We, the EMFI family want to thank you for supporting us with your prayers and blessings.

Please continue to encourage and take part so that we can be a blessing to many. We look forward to the coming year 2022 for even more fruitfulness with your support and prayers.

Seasons Greetings!

Please find the financials of the III quarter for your perusal.

Sukumar Chitturi

Those wishing to contribute can send your cheques/DDs in favour of: 'Evangelical Medical Fellowship of India' to the address given below
Or make an **Electronic/Bank transfer to:**

State Bank of India

Current A/c No: **35465591006**

(Branch Code: 2288, IFSC: SBIN0002288)

HDFC Bank

Savings A/c No: **04921000009885**

(Branch Code: 492, IFSC: HDFC0000492)

You can also make direct online payment by visiting our website www.emfi.in and clicking on the **DONATE NOW** button <https://emfi.in/donate/>

EMFI is charged 2.5% service charge for every transaction

IMPORTANT: We can only receive contributions from Indian passport holders.

Please call/Text/Email us after you make the transaction.

09176215489/90, emfihq@gmail.com

SCAN & PAY



UPI ID: EMFIHQ@SBI

Reflections from the General Secretary

A DISTURBING 'DESCENT'

This is the time where we remind ourselves of the glorious mystery of the incarnation, His descent from the realms of glory into our world of sin, frailty and futility.

Mathew, the writer of the first gospel begins his narrative about Jesus Christ by writing about an aspect of this descent, one that describes his descent by lineage, a genealogy. It is a historical record which affirms the messiah as coming in the line of Abraham, the father of faith and David the beloved King. Both of them had received great promises which will find fulfilment in the Messiah. Matthew also lists fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile and fourteen from the exile to the Christ, giving the narrative a sense of completeness and beauty.

Matthew however disturbs this beauty by introducing the names of four women apart from Mary, the blessed among women.

Tamar is mentioned first. Her story is a tragic one having several sad components. Widowed in her first marriage she is given her brother-in-law to continue the lineage. He sleeps with her but practices coitus interruptus, depriving her of a child to continue the lineage. When he dies, she is made to wait for the next son to grow up, but her father-in-law Judah, has no intention of giving his next son in marriage to her, though he promises her that he will do it. In her misery she lands up in a sad story of incest with her father-in-law. Out of this incident is born Perez, who continues the lineage. Why does Mathew have to remind us of this disturbing event which is best forgotten in the line of the Messiah, 'The Lion of Judah?'

Rahab is the next woman mentioned. Before coming to see the power of the God of Israel she was a gentile commercial sex worker. Later Salmon would marry her and continue the lineage to the Messiah? Why not just mention Salmon? Why do we need to be reminded of Rahab in the lineage and not just in the list of the people of faith which occurs in the book to Hebrews?

Ruth is the next woman mentioned. She is a Moabite by origin who took shelter under the God of Israel. Why not just mention Boaz and get away with the narrative? Why bring it up here?

The next woman mentioned is 'the one who had been the wife of Uriah.' Is Mathew putting it like this instead of just saying Bathsheba to jar us with the memory of the horrendous story of adultery, deceit, scheming and murder, committed by Israel's most beloved King. Solomon is the fruit of this incident, the one who will continue the line to the Messiah, who is called the son of David!

Why does Mathew sully the stream? Why does he attempt to pollute our gentle meditation of the infancy narrative of the Holy one to be born?

We can consider two things which may have been on Mathew's mind.

Firstly, the 'sullied past' is not so important for The Father that he will reject it and make his son to be born in a lineage that is 'spotlessly pure', indeed if there be one like that! The Messiah is able to take it. So, there is hope for us. The 'polluted past', either ours or that of our ancestors is within the sphere of our Lord's gracious incoming and acceptance. By his incarnation into this stream of life defiled and destroyed by our disobedience and rebellion, he is willing and able to make it his own in the light of his love and purity. The mess and the curse enter the sea of Grace and receive hope.

Secondly, Matthew may be telling us that the time for endogamy based on 'special' groups of people is not very important to the Lord, now that the messiah is here. Great leaders like Nehemiah and Ezra had acted against Jews marrying gentile women. In the prophet Malachi, the man who marries the daughter of a foreign god is to be cut off from the tents of Israel. But the lineage of the Messiah includes such women and men who married them.

'Caste - based endogamy' is our subtle way of perpetuating the evil of casteism among ourselves. We feed our children with this milk with hints subtle and those not so subtle. Even if the spouse in consideration is a believer and a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would like our lineage to be unsullied by refusing such a proposal.

Will the Messiah be impressed?

In another context he talked about his coming as 'the new wine'. He wanted us to hold this 'new wine' in new bottles, new structures of thought and feeling, new lives.

We celebrate Christmas in a time, characterized by uncertainty. As we celebrate our Lord Jesus who came among us through a 'disturbing descent', shall we let the 'old gourd' of 'caste-based endogamy' be broken by the glorious new wine?

Samuel Sidhartha

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