

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17

DO YOU SEE THE ELDERS?

The gospel reading for today is unique. It is not a parable or a miracle, not a story of Jesus reaching out to the lost and alone. The gospel reading today is the story of Jesus's ancestry. It tells of the genealogy of Jesus all the way back through the patriarch Abraham. Twenty-eight generations of a family, perhaps these are the elders we see carrying the scrolls in our image.

Looking into Jesus' family tree, one might expect to find it populated with upstanding characters, individuals of exemplary moral character. Certainly, nothing unseemly would be found in the lineage of the son of God?! Nevertheless, the men and women depicted represent stories of betrayal, failure, lust, adultery, even murder and prostitution. To say the least, Jesus's family was as colorful as are our families.

Many kinds of people walk through our doors every day. Our long-term care facilities serve all kinds of families, each one more colorful and dynamic than the last. Some come with stories that burst at the seams and others share narratives we must strain to be able to hear. In Catholic health care, each of these families are respected, cherished and served. Each person is known and understood as an individual and as part of a community. It is our uniqueness, the parts of our story with the most color — be they loud or quiet — that make a vivid picture.



For the next three days, the gospels recount stories of angels passing on messages of miraculous births. First Joseph, then Zachariah, and finally, Mary, are told of the children that are to come. Each of these stories would have been picked up by the town gossips and shared widely. What might have looked like human failure, lust or even adultery, we know to be God's perfect work. Jesus' imperfect heritage, curious conception and miraculous birth remind us that God works in mysterious ways through our imperfect stories.

In Advent, and the leadup to the Christmas holiday, it is easy to fall into old roles or family patterns, or to begin comparing our experiences against another's. Instead, our challenge is to look into our own history not with an eye toward judgment, but with a heart open to seeing God's work in our family stories and the face of Christ in each member. How can you relinquish the need to be picture-perfect and Christmas-card ready in favor of real connections and celebrations this season?

Visit the Online Advent Calendar at CHAUSA.ORG/ADVENT