

What's in a Name? Matthew 1:21

The name given to Jesus, while a common name back then, took on special meaning because of what it declared about the who He was and what He came to do. The name "**Jesus**" was transformed from an everyday name into a very special one. No other name fits the Savior. Allah does not fit nor does Buddha or any other name. His name is "**Jesus**".

The name given by Joseph to his son was a very common Hebrew name. Dozens of Jewish babies were given that name every year. The name "**Jesus**" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name "Joshua" and literally means "God saves." Joseph gave this name to his son because an angel appeared to him and told him to name his son that. Read Matthew 1:20-21.

A name in the orient was often more than a way of calling someone. It often encompassed the whole person and occasionally described the individual or expressed the faith of the parents. In naming his son Jesus, Joseph was expressing, at God's direction, the essence of who this one born in a manger really was.

It was God who selected the name and instructed Joseph to call his soon to be born son "**Jesus**". It was God's choice of a name because that name described what the birth we celebrate each Christmas was all about. God wanted to declare to the world that this child to be born in Bethlehem according to the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament was none other than the one whom God was sending to save His people from their sins.

In reading the biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus we discover that Jesus was given additional names that help us understand more precisely how Jesus would accomplish this and how, because of His provision, we are to relate to Him. Read Luke 2:11

By calling Jesus the Messiah the angel was declaring that He was the "**Christ**" or literally the "**anointed one**." That was actually a title for the position He would hold as "***the promised one***." That title came to be a name He would be known by.

In that same verse, as well as in Luke 1:17, He is called "**Lord**." Over 80 times in Acts, and the New testament books that follow, Jesus is referred to as "**The Lord Jesus Christ**." **Jesus** was the name on His birth certificate and what His friends called him when He was a child growing up in Nazareth. **Lord** and **Christ** are descriptive names that clarified what He had come to do, and how we should view Him.

Read Matthew 1:23. Immanuel was one of the descriptive names given to the promised one by Isaiah. Read Isaiah 7:14. Jesus was God coming to dwell with us.

In Matthew 2:2 we find the Wise Men giving Him another name or title as they call Him the "**King of the Jews**." Later in the New Testament He will be described in an even broader way. He will be called the **King of kings** and **Lord of lords**.

The names and titles were descriptions of why He came to dwell among us. Jesus was not born because the world needed a happy holiday, or stores needed a huge selling time. Jesus was not even born because the world needed an example of how to live. Jesus was born because the world needed a Savior.

In Genesis we discover that the problem with mankind is a sin problem brought about by the decision of Adam to disobey God. From that time on mankind suffered in innumerable ways but none more serious than the sin problem that separates us from God. So serious is the sin problem that it not only separates us from God here and now but, more critically, prohibits us from spending eternity with Him. The Apostle Paul would declare everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and therefore everyone is separated from Him. Jesus came to save us from the sin problem. God instructed Joseph to name Him "**God Saves.**"

Dozens of other babies born that year were probably named Jesus. It was as common as John or Jim today. But no one else bore that name at the directive of God because no other child ever born was truly born to save His people the way Jesus was. Read Matthew 20:25-28 where Jesus made it clear why He came.

We have noted often that Christmas makes no sense without Good Friday and Easter. Christmas draws its meaning from the Cross and the payment of the penalty of our sins. God knew that Jesus was coming into our world to die on a Cross. He had not been born to be free of pain and suffering but to bear in His body our sins. So, God said, "**Name him Jesus, Name Him, 'God saves'**" because that is why He has come." His name is, in modern terminology, His mission statement. Read in Philippians 2:9 what Paul had to say about that name.

We have no idea when the full impact of that name became clear to His family or His disciples but read in Acts 4:12 what Peter said about that name. A little later the Apostle Paul wrote about that name. Read what he said in Philippians 2:10-11

Why is His name above every name? Because He saves. He saves from the penalty of sin and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us, we have power over sin itself. He came to save us from both the penalty and power of sin.

In time the name God told Joseph to give to the new child would take on a significant meaning beyond anything Joseph could have imagined. Jesus said at least 6 times in John "**whatever you ask in my name, you will be granted.**" Read Matthew 9:41 The commission given to Paul in Acts 9:15 is the same commission we all have, to go and proclaim His name. Read Matthew 18:20 and Revelation 2:1-7. Then read Colossians 3:17.

Why was it so important for God to tell us that He would save? In part because none of the other promises associated with that Name would be possible without salvation. Unless the sin problem that separates from God is cared for, fellowship with Him and blessing that flow from Him are

impossible. His power is available only to those whose sins have been forgiven because of the provision of the Cross.

Men and women have always been aware of their sinfulness and a fascinating study is to see how over the centuries individuals and religions have sought to deal with that problem.

Today many psychologists, and society in general tell us that the guilt of sin can be cared for by the realization that it does not really exist. There is no such thing as sin. Sin, of course, cannot exist without a God to judge it so many in our society who deny there is a God also deny there is sin or judgment on it. God, however, says sin is real and it condemns the sinner. But Jesus saves.

Throughout history others have begun new religions that said in one way or another that forgiveness of sin is available to those who live right, who follow their set of rules, rules that are the requirement essential to earn redemption. There is nothing man can ever do to earn salvation, which is why Paul wrote that we are saved by faith, not of works so that no one can boast of earning salvation. Man says earn and God says turn to the one who alone came to save. Call Him Jesus because He will save His people.

This Christmas we will hear the name of Jesus often, usually presented as “the baby Jesus” and we will see pictures of Him lying in a manger but remember, He is more than just a baby in a manger, He is Jesus, He is “God saves.” Remember that the true message of Christmas is that Jesus came to us so as to be our Savior. Remember also that, while He came to save all who are lost and His provision for sin is adequate for all men at all times, it is effective only in the lives of those who have personally invited Him to be their Savior. Jesus will never force Himself on anyone but as Jesus Himself said in John 3:16 “**whosoever believes.**” Read I John 1:11-13. That is what Christmas is all about. That is why God told Joseph to name him Jesus. He came to save His people. That is not only what we must believe, it is what we must share with family, friends and neighbors because any other celebration of Christmas is less than God planned it to be.