

The Name: Jesus, Matthew 1:18-21

In our Christmas Eve passage we have the famous event of how Joseph came to find out Mary was pregnant with the Messiah and what His name would be- the name Jesus. We happen to be in a small group where every couple is either pregnant or just had a baby. And let me say that made us nervous, hoping it wasn't contagious...skip right over us please. And so a part of their world is deciding on a name for their baby. What is in a name? Well I did some fun google research this week to find out. The majority of American parents choose a name based on three factors- #3 It has some nostalgic or family meaning- named after someone in the family, or a town the couple visited that they like. #2 It's Baggage Free. Ex-boyfriend/girlfriend, that bully or that annoying kid that picked his nose in class. #1 They like the way it sounds. We followed these factors. Do you reveal your baby name to others beforehand? One survey, 82% of people said No. You can understand why you don't, you don't want a bunch of opinions ahead of time. While Shannan was in labor, one of the nurses asked what we were going to name our 2nd son, we said Aidan, she says, "Well we've had lots of Aidan's born here, you sure you want to name him that?" Seriously?? Now is the time you want us to second-guess the name? Now what do you think were the most popular boy and girl names of 2021? Olivia for girl, Liam for a boy.

While our names may have some significance in our modern world, in the days of the Bible, names were essential. People never just got a name because parents liked the way it sounded. "Ya know what would sound awesome? Haggai, Dorcus..." Your name meant something, it was your identity and contained your parents' hopes and dreams for your life. There were two important aspects to your name: **the source of the name**- who gives it to you was extremely important because it spoke of who was your authority. In Bible times, your authority was intrinsically connected with your parents, tribe and your God. What was right and wrong, what was true about you, what was honorable and worthy came from the authorities in your life- parents, tribe and God. The second aspect to your name was **its meaning** because the meaning was your purpose. Why are you here? What are your parent's hopes for you to become and live out? And your ability to live up to your family authority and name was your source of honor, integrity and standing in the culture. And it is with Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, he wants us to see why the source and meaning of Jesus' name is so significant in history and for each one of us tonight. Let's get back to the story.

Matthew 1 ¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Mary and Joseph were your average, ordinary, working-class couple in the small town of Bethlehem. And they were in what we might consider today the engagement period, betrothal in those days. And like in modern times this was the preparation period. Joseph would have been busy preparing the future home for them, they would be preparing for a ceremony in the

town. Certainly, the expectation would have been that they would not sexually consummate their relationship until after marriage. In fact, it was forbidden in the law of God. And so when Joseph finds out Mary is pregnant, he would have been devastated. Clearly, she was not who he thought she was... but he was honorable and a merciful man, so he quietly prepared to break off the betrothal and move on so that both Mary and Joseph would experience the least amount of shame in the community and to their family. Now we tend to think of ancient people as superstitious and people who would easily believe in the miraculous. But that's the case here. In fact, we find out from Luke's gospel that Mary knew first that this was a miracle because she was visited by the angel of the Lord, certainly she would have told Joseph about all this, but since virgin conceptions aren't a thing, he doesn't believe her any more than you would believe that. But before he moved toward breaking off marriage, He has an encounter with the divine that would alter what He believed was possible.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Friends let me just say, the doctrine of the virgin Birth at Christmas is just as important as the doctrine of the death and resurrection at Easter. If Jesus was born of natural means just like all of us, he could not be God and he could not be sinless. He is born of the Spirit making Him God in the flesh and sinless, without inheriting the sin of Adam's human race. And because he is God in flesh and sinless he qualified to be the perfect substitute for our sins on the cross. All of this leads us to the significance of naming Jesus.

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

The significance of the Source of His Name.

Normally it was the father's right to name the child. But notice who gives Jesus his name. It is the messenger of God himself, not Joseph who chooses the name. Unlike every other child who had been born in history up to this moment whose parents had authority over the child, Joseph and Mary did not have authority over this child. This is the one whose origins are from ancient times. Remember when Jesus is a young boy and they lose track of him in Jerusalem? When you were a kid, did you ever wander off from your parents? This would happen to me on the boardwalk and OCNJ- but my parents would find me usually in the arcade or the fudge shop. But when Mary and Joseph lose track of Jesus they don't find him entertaining himself, they find him in the temple courts listening and teaching. And Jesus tells his parents, I must be in my Father's house. Jesus' authority was divine, not earthly.

[Blank Slide] Today, many people think they can name Jesus. They can exercise authority over him and define him. "Well I prefer to think of Jesus as a good teacher, as a political revolutionary, or as a motivating idea but not a historical person or not God." Or "I like Jesus to be all loving and never judging people." Don't do that. Just like Joseph and Mary- you do not have the right or authority to name Jesus and define who he is. When Jesus stood before Pilate

at his trial, Pilate attempted to define Jesus and exercise authority over him, He said, “Don’t you know that I have authority over you to crucify you?” And yes replied, “Nope. Only what has been allowed by God.” Jesus is not someone you can deconstruct and remake based on your own preference. He is God in the flesh. He is the one who has the right and authority to name and define you, because he made you. At the name Jesus every knee will bow. **Colossians 1:16** *For in him [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*

Secondly, we see the significance of the meaning of His name.

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

The name Jesus is the anglicized name of the Hebrew word, “Ya’Shua” which means the LORD will save. And this is exactly what the angel says is his very purpose for which he came. To save people from their sins. As we said, a name in Bible times was given to express the hopes and dreams of the parents for the child and who that child would become. My name means, gift of God. Let me tell you, I used to think that I was God’s gift, in fact, that was one of my pick-up lines...I digress. There are many times throughout my life that I have failed to live up to my name, in fact, many times when I would have been the opposite. But Jesus fulfilled the purpose of His name perfectly. He knew why he was born and throughout his entire life there wasn’t a moment He deviated from his purpose. **Mark 10:45** *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

[Blank Slide] You know there is only one Jesus- and it is not you and me. But the problem the Bible tells us is that we all want to become our own saviors. Two primary ways do this- through our morality. We try to be good enough, acceptable enough, smart enough, secure enough that we earn our salvation. We say, God must accept me because he owes me for how God I have been. The problem of course is that the Bible says all have sinned and fallen woefully short of the glory of God. And we know that from experience. The other way is through self-authority. We redefine God, redefine truth, we redefine morality, we redefine purpose, we redefine life and what happens when we die based on our own authority and sensibilities. This is stated clearly the humanist manifesto- rejects God, truth, his authority and holds that man must save himself. “Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement.” But we hear it subtly in the widely accepted mantras of our day, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are true to yourself.” This is what the Bible calls rebellion against our creator and exchanging the truth of God for a lie. Self-salvation through morality or through self-actualization is an attempt to rename yourself Jesus. **Acts 4:12** *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name [other than Jesus] under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

Friends, here’s the wonderful news. Just as Jesus received His identity and purpose from God, in Jesus, you and I can receive our eternal identity and purpose. **John 1:12-13** ¹² *Yet to all who*

did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The love of God for humanity compelled Him to send Jesus to be our savior. By receiving Jesus- His identity as God in flesh and his purpose as savior for our sins, we receive a new family name- You first name might be Olivia or Liam... but your last name will be "Ben Yahweh" of the LORD. Just like that first Christmas Jesus received his name, this Christ you can receive a new name.

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