

Matthew 1:18-25

December 17, 2017

A long time ago William Shakespeare asked, “What is in a name?” A lot.

A name, your name is more than a label—it is a part of who you are. It is a part of you. Your name is the word that is most closely associated with you. Your name is a word that gets your attention. Your name might be the same as others, but you aren't. Your name—what it is and why your parents chose it has a story all its own.

Every name in this room is freighted with meaning and has a story.

Maybe your name came from—

- An Uncle who died in the war?
- A television character?
- A Bible personality?
- Your mom just always liked the name.
- Your father?
- Your grandmother?
- Or maybe your parents just liked how it sounded.

Every name in this room is freighted with meaning and has a story.

Today we are going to talk about a name that is freighted with the most meaning and has the best story.

- A name sung by angels.
- A name reviled by Satan.

- A name whispered by the broken.
- A name spoken by commoners.
- A name revered by royalty.
- A name shouted by the grateful.
- A name loved by the living and cherished by the dying.
- A name that will be celebrated forever without end.

Jesus.

What is in his name? A lot.

What is the story to his name? More than you might think.

PROP: Believe the ‘Lord saves’ the best and worst of us by becoming God with us.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he

took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” Matthew 1:18-25

PRAY

This story, the first Christmas story has been told so often by so many so that most of us think we know every nook and cranny of the story. We’ve seen so many nativity scenes so many times that we think we have seen it all.

But I’m not so sure. This story is dripping with irony and humanity. Irony because there is straight up crazy stuff going on here. Humanity because Joseph responded exactly like you or I would.

Where are we?

Matthew tells the story from Joseph’s perspective—

We find that in Matthew 1, Joseph and Mary are engaged, the text says betrothed (say that if you want to sound really important). But in that day, a betrothal was legally binding and to break it off would take a divorce.

Joseph gets engaged to a good, Jewish girl and goes away to prepare a place for them to live after they get married.

Vs. 18,

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”

Okay. That is super-weird.

Matthew is so understated in the way that he says this that it seems that being with child by the Holy Spirit happens all the time. But there is all sorts of irony in this—

- Who found her to be pregnant?

- Was Mary scared Joseph would find out?
- Did Joseph get angry?
- Was there a lot of yelling?

The text doesn't tell us that they talked but if they did, imagine how strange the interchange must have been—

Joseph: Mary, either you gained a bunch of weight or you are pregnant.

Mary: I am pregnant.

Joseph: I thought you wanted to be with me.

Mary: I do. You don't understand.

Joseph: I know where babies come from, Mar...Why did you take up with another man?

Mary: I didn't. I am pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

Joseph: I've heard some bad excuses in my day but that has to go down as the worst. You could have come up with a better story. I know where babies come from and they do not come from the Holy Spirit.

Mary: Really, it is true. An angel came, I wrote a song. The baby is from the Holy Spirit.

Joseph: Whatever. Have fun with ridiculous story. Family pictures should be fun: Baby, you Holy Spirit. I'm out.

Men—if you find your fiancée pregnant and she says that it was by the Holy Spirit—you do what Joseph did:

That is what any of us would have done and that appears to be what Joseph was going to do.

Vs. 19,

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Joseph didn't want to make a scene and expose her to the shame that would come with the charge of adultery. In that day, adulteresses could be executed. Though smarting with the pain of rejection, Joseph didn't want revenge he just wanted it to be over—

²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

As Joseph tried to sleep on these things—God sent a messenger to tell him that she was telling you the truth.

That baby was from the Holy Spirit. He will never doubt her again.

But there is more.

She will have a boy.

And you Joseph must call him Jesus.

Jesus was not a unique name. At that time it was the 6th most popular name in the area. The 6th most common name in our area is David.

Others had the name Jesus. It was common. That was one of the reasons that later he was called Jesus of Nazareth so as to differentiate him from Jesus of:

- Capernaum
- Jerusalem
- Rochester

The name Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua. What? What is the Spanish version of the name John? Juan. Russian? Ivan.

Greek version of the name Joshua is Jesus.

When you name someone you are expressing authority over them. And Joseph did not get to choose the name of the baby boy.

Naming implies authority. In that day, if you name someone you have authority over them. That is why fathers named their children and kings renamed their captured enemies. It was a way of remembering who was master.

Joseph did not choose the name, it was chosen for him. He did not have authority over the boy. This boy was different.

Yes, Joseph would be the father of Jesus but there was also a sense in which he would never have authority over Jesus. Every time he used the name he was reminded that God had named this boy.

Joseph did not have authority over this baby—and no one else could either. This child would become the man with ultimate authority. No one owned him. No one told him to do anything he did not also want to do.

Jesus answered to God the Father alone and no one else. He was submitted to no one besides God the Father. And as such, God the father named the boy, Jesus.

And we also find out why God chose the name, Jesus.

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Why would he be called Jesus? Because he would save his people from their sins.

What?

Jesus means Yahweh or the Lord saves.

You will call this boy—the angel says—The Lord saves.
Because he will save them from their sins.

What is in a name? A lot.

In this case the very mission of God—to save.

He will save his people from their sins—

He will save his people from their sins NOT

- Their trials but their sins.
- Their disappointments but their sins.
- Their heartache but their sins.
- Their angst but their sins.
- Their agitation but their sins.
- Their diseases but their sins.

He will help them in all those things but he came to save his people from their sins.

Why sins?

Because our sins are the thing we most need saving from. Sins go by many names—transgressions, mistakes, lust, transgressions, trespasses, disobedience—but we all know we do wrong. That is sin.

We might not be as bad as we could be or worse than the other people in our lives, but have our sins and they can't just be erased. We need to be saved from them.

Jesus means “the Lord saves.”

All need to be saved because all do wrong. All have sin. All need saving from sin.

But how?

We hear another name in this text—a name echoed from long ago that was spoken centuries before:

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us).

Another name. Immanuel. A title, really. We saw this title last week, promised 700 years before the baby in a manger.

Jesus the one who would save his people from their sins was ALSO Immanuel God with us. There are many unique features to Christianity but here is one that is singular.

Jesus is God.

- He is not less than God.
- He is not similar to God.
- He is not like God.

Jesus is God.

- He does not resemble God.
- He does not merely pass for God.
- He does not appear like God.

Jesus is God.

- He was not JUST a good teacher.
- He was not JUST a good man.
- He was not JUST a prophet.

Jesus is God.

Immanuel—God with us. He did not descend on winged chariot or in a pillar of fire—but he came as a baby. God became man and put on flesh.

- The one with no beginning was born.
- The Jewel of heaven came to earth.
- The creator was created.

The baby born—Jesus Christ—was Immanuel God with us. He was the one who was eternally the Alpha and Omega and had no beginning—yet he was born to be with us.

God became man.

In ages gone by men and women were awed by the thought that God could become man. In fact, that message was so unlikely to be unbelievable for so many. God could not become man.

God is far up there—removed from all this.

Mankind is down here—stuck in all this.

People would hear the Christian message that Jesus is God with us shake their heads, scoff, guffaw and say—
“Everyone knows God cannot become man.”

It was too incredible for them to believe. God with us was wishful thinking, a fairy tale, foolish myth.

Too good to be true.

We moderns think differently.

We don't think it that remarkable that God would become man. It makes perfect sense. It would not be so demeaning to become like us. In fact, through science, medicine and technology mankind will try to become gods.

Watch. You will notice more and more that seeping into the American culture the idea that immortality might just be possible. Human Genome project will crack disease and technology will decipher consciousness.

And maybe we won't have to do. And maybe man can become god.

We will see a day when people will have selective surgery to replace limbs they were born with technologically superior ones.

You think I overstate my case?

For a few weeks, this year a book was pinned to the NY Times bestseller (#19 most read) list in NON-Fiction that puts forth the idea that mankind will evolve into a race of super-beings. A being that will not die and be immortal. In his earlier humanity was little more than animals and yet through the wonder of technology we become gods.

This kind of thinking has already entered the American mind—but watch—it will explode.

We have come to the place in our world where people are ready that men and women can become gods. We live in a world where people are more likely to believe that man can become a god than God would become a man.

And that is why the story of the birth is no big deal.

Mankind longs for immortality—which is good—but he longs for immortality on his own terms—which is tragic.

He does not want Jesus—the Lord saves. He wants to save himself. But that is not the message of Christmas.

Man CANNOT become God and ascend to heaven. But God has become man and descended to earth. Immanuel means God with us.

So Joseph heard and listened.

- He did not divorce Mary.
- He did take her as his wife.
- He did not reject the baby.
- He did name the baby Jesus.

What are the names we have heard in this section?

- Jesus: The Lord saves
- Immanuel: God with us

The Lord saves by becoming God with us.

What are we to make of this?

At least three things:

- Unexpected
- Unrivaled
- Unconcerned

1. Unexpected—

Salvation and God with us did not go together in the Old Testament.

God was in the midst of his people but not with them. His people were frightened and scared whenever he showed up.

All the original readers remembered another time when the nation of Israel had Immanuel God with them and they said—leave us!

[16] On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. [17] Then Moses brought the people out of the

camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. [18] Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. [19] And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. [20] The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Exodus 19:16–20

And as Moses went on up the people scooted further back. Immanuel God with them was super-scary. They stood far off and heard the thunder and watched the explosions and the people looked at what it was like to have God with them and they said,

[18] Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off [19] and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”...The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was...” Exodus 20:18-19,21

The people would always stand far off, they did not want God to be with them. Having Immanuel—God with us was not safe. They were afraid they would die. Let Moses go and speak with God. Only let us not hear his voice or we will die.

How could God be Immanuel if people were afraid to hear him speak? How could God be with a people who did not want him to be with them?

He would have to come down.

He would have to come down not in a flash of fire or with trumpets or smoke or shouts or on a chariot but in a manger.

The reason the people were afraid is not because God was unkind but because God was holy and they were not. The people were afraid of God because he was so other than they were. They knew they did not measure up. They knew they had done wrong. They knew they were not right.

And so they didn't want Immanuel God with them.

The people were afraid—so God had to come to them as one of them so that they might come to God.

So Immanuel—God came to be with us as one of us. And instead of coming as Lord is angry—he came the Lord saves. Jesus came.

Instead of appearing in smoke and fire and lightning and glory he came as a baby.

While no one would come to a smoking mountain, there is no one alive that is afraid of a baby. God traded in thunder for crying. Rumbblings for cooings. Flashes of lightning for smiles.

Immanuel was not terrifying anymore.

That was unexpected. Jesus—Immanuel God with us—we need not push him away for fear of rejection.

We need not say—we will stand far off let someone else speak to us about this Jesus.

We can come to him and know he cannot he will not send us away.

That is unexpected. The way was also unrivaled—

2. Unrivaled

The way was unrivaled. There was no other way to rescue people from their sins. In every other religious tradition, salvation comes by making yourself a better person. Maybe by obedience or regular prayers or getting rid of desires or emptying your mind or choosing the right.

In all those ways, you are asked to be the one who save yourself by yourself to make yourself better. Christianity is unrivaled because instead of telling people what they must do we celebrate what Jesus has done.

Jesus was not just good—he was (is) God with us.

Jesus does not ask you to save yourself—The Lord saves.

We are not told in chapter 1 how Jesus would save his people from their sins but the book of Matthew has more to say on the topic.

Jesus himself speaks many times of HOW he planned on saving his people. One such place is Matthew 20:28,

“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28

Mankind was trapped by sin and held for ransom by eternal death. Jesus came to live up to his name to be the way that the Lord saves. He came to give up his life as a ransom for many.

You have to believe if there was any other way to save his people from their sins—he would do it that way.

- He spoke through nature but that was insufficient
- He spoke through prophets but that was insufficient.
- He spoke for himself and gave himself up.

He died because there was no other way. The ransom had to be paid by someone and Jesus was the only one who could pay the debt we owed.

He did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Jesus means the “Lord saves.” This means he does not merely offer a pardon. To put it starkly, Jesus does not merely offer mercy. He offers mercy and grace, because he is “The Lord who saves.”

Let me explain—

Mercy just says—You have done wrong, you have fallen short, you deserve to be punished. You deserve a great many bad things to befall you. You deserve it but mercy says—you will not receive any punishment.

Mercy is magnificent. Mercy is splendid but insufficient. But if Jesus only offered mercy he would not live up to his name. He would not be the ‘Lord saves’ he would be the ‘Lord absolves.’ Mercy is a pardon but we need more than a pardon.

But Jesus means ‘The Lord saves.’

That means Jesus offers grace in addition to mercy.

Let me explain. Those who receive mercy from God are forgiven but if God only offers forgiveness in Christ he could wipe our slates clean, absolve us BUT Jesus means the Lord saves NOT merely the Lord absolves.

Salvation means BOTH that we are saved FROM sin and saved TO God. In other words God gives us grace. He is Jesus—the Lord who saves.

The Lord saves—God has come to be with us—by dying for us and taking upon himself our sins. He has come to save

us from the penalty of our every sin. His name is Jesus—the Lord saves.

He saves his people from their sins by dying and rising for them. He has secured new life for those who are willing to let him to be Jesus—The Lord who saves.

Christians—this means:

- You are saved—completely. You need no longer fear any punishment.
- You have not just received mercy—you have received grace from the Lord who saves by becoming God with us for us.

He died so you can live.

He rose so that you can rise.

He lives so that you live.

He is the Lord who saves and has given us more than mercy, more than a pardon. He has given himself. That means all the blessings due Jesus are ours.

- All the rights Jesus has as crucified and risen are ours.
- All the blessings Jesus has are ours.
- His standing before God is our standing before God.

He is the Lord that saves—Christians can think that when they sin that somehow God rejects them. No. That is not how his salvation is. He is the Lord who saves.

And those he saves—he keeps.

- He cannot; he will not reject you.
- He cannot; he will not get tired of you.
- He will; he must always forgive you.
- He will; he must always love you.

- He will; he must be on your side.
- He will; he must work for your best.

Because he is the Lord who saves who has become God with us.

This means—you can't just be okay with Jesus. You can't be and indifferent with him. He is either the Lord who saves by becoming God with us or not.

Not a Christian—

- Don't respect Jesus—trust him.
- Don't admire Jesus—trust him.
- Don't esteem Jesus—trust him.
- Don't like Jesus—trust him.

He is the Lord who saves because he became God with us.

- There is peace for your soul in his name.
- There is forgiveness for your sins in his name.
- There is an end to your guilt in his name.
- There is an end to your strivings in his name.
- There is an end to your fears in his name.
- There is an end to your anxieties in his name.

Because what is in his name is who he is.

He is the Lord who saves by becoming God with us.
Believe that and you will be one of his people.