

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
“So, What’s in a Name? Everything!”
Matthew 1:18–25
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Matthew 1:18-25 says [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. [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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This text records something that is somewhat unusual yet on the other hand very usual and that is the fact that a father is to name his son. We went through that as a family as my wife and I named our three children. She and I would discuss the name, negotiate it and work our way through it and then we named our children. This was an interesting process. Our first born we named Jennifer Elizabeth. Elizabeth was my great grandmother’s name and we wanted to honor her because it was her diligent daily prayers that God used to bring salvation throughout my family. Eleven of her children came to Christ gloriously and then it spread throughout all of our family. We praise the Lord for that. My great grandmother was called Lizzy, Elizabeth or mammy. So why Jennifer? It is a Cornish derivative from Guinevere and she was the queen wife of King Arthur and it means ‘fair one’ or ‘the fair one’ and the notion of the fair lady comes from that name.

Then we had our son, our second child, and we didn’t discuss his name for long. We just decided to follow the rule of the family which he would be Harry Lloyd Reeder IV and he would get the same nickname I had, my dad had and my grandfather had which was Ike so we now had a dynasty. We just didn’t have a kingdom and that was our only problem but we added to the dynasty. Then we had our third born who was named Abigail Lois and she bore the name of another grandmother. Abigail was the third wife of King David and she was the one who was beautiful and discerning but the name in Hebrew means ‘father’s joy’ or ‘father’s delight’ or the ‘delight or joy of the father.’ So we chose that name for her. The only one left in the family is my wife and I didn’t get to choose her first name but had the opportunity to give her my last name. Her name was Cynthia Lou Miller but I have had a lot of fun with Cindy Lou my whole life. The name Cindy means she who must be obeyed at all times (smile). So that is our family and our names.

When we think our way through giving a name we are defining something we want our children to be. Now we have no ultimate control, yet we have input, of what they are going to be

and a name many times will reveal something about us in terms of what we want them to be. That is not the case in the Matthew text we just read for this was not a name that Joseph came up with that he wanted his son to be. This was a name that was given to him by the angel.

It is interesting to note in the context of this text how Joseph comes to this point. Jesus isn't so much as his adopted son as is Joseph is Jesus' adopted father. He is His legal father and adopted father and as that he is to name his son but he and Mary do not go into consultation on this for from heaven the Name is given by the angel to Joseph. It is not a name describing what they would want this One to be but a name that is describing who He is and what He will do. Also two names are given to Joseph – Jesus and Immanuel.

I love studying the Gospels and one thing you learn very quickly is they are all writing about the life of Jesus but it's like four people each standing on a corner watching the same event in the middle of the street. Because they are standing on four different corners they each have a different perspective and encounter it with a different experience so as they write it out the Holy Spirit is leading the authors of the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – to write about the life of Jesus from a certain perspective. When it comes to this event of the birth of Jesus Mark basically skips right over the birth and picks up at the public ministry of Jesus but not so with Matthew, Luke and John.

John's perspective steps up and with the scope of eternity, he describes the birth of Jesus as the Son of God who has come into the world and taken upon Himself humanity. The Word who was with God and is God has come in the flesh. The Word became flesh and now humbles Himself by addition where He takes on humanity. John 1:14 says *[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* So that is stepping and looking from eternity. Luke steps back but not all the way into eternity. He steps back into the very moment when Mary is called and the forerunner is brought, John the Baptist. His focus is upon Mary.

Matthew comes a little closer. He begins his account 'Now the birth of Jesus is as follows...' The word birth here is where we get the word Genesis from. It is the beginning of the Messiah in this world. Jesus, the Son of God is eternal but taking upon Himself humanity is a point of beginning and at that point Matthew picks it up with a message to Joseph. It is a message to Joseph after something has already happened between him and Mary. What has happened? They have committed to their marriage.

If you went back 2000 years ago and raised in a Hebrew home, a marriage had taken on a three-fold reality. The first thing that would happen is a covenantal commitment to marriage. Then would come a covenantal ceremony of marriage and then the covenantal consummation of the marriage bed. All three were necessary to be declared complete. So there was the betrothal, the covenantal wedding feast and ceremony and lastly the consummation of the marriage bed which is to be held in honor among all.

In this text step one has happened with Mary and Joseph where they have had the betrothal. Some would say this is like our engagement but it's really not for it's more than an engagement because when Joseph is assuming that Mary has been unfaithful which is why she is with child, Joseph being a righteous man, knows he must bring forth the consequences of a divorce. We don't get a divorce when we break an engagement. This betrothal is a husband wife relationship yet there is not intimacy in the marriage for that awaits the ceremony. In this period of time men would be free from military service and a lot of things but they would prove their ability to provide and the woman would affirm her commitment of purity, during this period of betrothal to the covenantal ceremony.

So we know that Joseph finds out that Mary is with child but we're not told how Joseph found out she is with child. We do know that he is assuming that she has been unfaithful and so he is going to divorce her but his compassion is so great that he is going to do it privately, and not publically. It is in that context that the angel comes to him, sent from the Lord and says to him, 'Joseph don't do that because the child within her has been conceived of the Holy Spirit.' In other words, she has been faithful.

This is a miracle as we talk about the Virgin birth. Actually it wasn't a virgin birth for the virgin gave birth because the text tells us that Joseph did not know her sexually until after Jesus was born. So it was virgin that gave birth but the miracle is the virgin conception. It was the conception by a virgin, was kept a virgin and then came the birth by the virgin but the Child was brought forth by the Spirit of God into this world and the Son of God takes upon Himself humanity.

Why does He do it? The Name is given to you to tell you. Joseph, this is the Name you are to give to your son, Yeshua. In the Old Testament the Hebrew version of this name is Joshua. In the Aramaic and the Greek it is Yeshua, Jesus. It is two words put together which is Yahweh – Jehovah saves. God saves. You will call His Name Yeshua because this Child will save His people from their sins. It is not a name of what you hope He will do but it is a name that declares what He came to do and will do.

The second thing said about Him is that He is the fulfillment of prophecy. That is a big deal with Matthew because he has a real burden that the people of Israel know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. Jesus fulfills the calling of the Messiah as Prophet, Priest and King. So Matthew throughout his Gospel is going to take great pains to show that this is the promised Messiah and one of the ways he does this is by showing how Jesus fulfills all the prophecies. There are 60 plus direct prophecies pointing to Jesus from the Old Testament and I'm not talking about the various types, shadows, narratives and pre-incarnate appearances of Christ but in the opening four chapters of Matthew he identifies ten of them that are fulfilled in Jesus.

Here in our text of Scripture Matthew reaches for one of those prophecies from Isaiah when it says in Matthew 1:23, [23] "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel*" (which means, *God with us*). In the second name given to the Child we find out how Yahweh, Jehovah, saves us. Jehovah saves us by sending Jehovah God, the Son of God. God Himself has come to save us. He has come among us to be one of us to take the place of us to save us from our sins on the cross. That is why He is named Yeshua, Immanuel. It's not a name of what we hope He will be or do but it is a name revealing who He is and what He has come to do. It describes what He will do and who the One is who will do it.

It's interesting to note that when the Father does these great acts in the Bible He acts through the Son. Through the Son He created everything. Through the Son He comes into this world as the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us, the Incarnation. Through the Son He saves us on the cross. Through the Son He declares our salvation at the resurrection. What is interesting is the role of darkness when God shows up to bring light. Let's look at what it says about the birth of Jesus in Isaiah 9.

Isaiah 9:2 says [2] *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.* When Jesus comes into this world God has been silent for 400 years for the light of His revelation has ceased and the people are walking in darkness. Then God speaks. The Word becomes flesh. The light of the Lord comes to dispel the darkness of our sin. It happens every time God does something through His Son.

What was the condition of the world when God created it? There was a deep darkness over the face of the earth and God said through His Son “let there be light.”

When Jesus comes into this world in the Incarnation the people are walking in a great darkness. When Jesus goes to that cross to save us the darkness descended upon the earth yet the light of our salvation is on the cross. When He comes down from the cross He is placed in the darkness of a stone sealed tomb and He comes forth in victory. The darkness of death cannot hold Him. This is the Name above every name. It is at the name of Jesus that every knee shall bow but in this day whoever will confess His Name and say ‘I am a sinner, I need a Savior, I can’t save myself, my sincerity or religion can’t save me, Jesus take control of my life’ will be saved. What a glorious day this is where we celebrate Jesus and this day is a day that if you have not you can be born again to have everlasting life.

Instead of muddling through the darkness of the false promises of this world you can come to Him in whom all the promises are ‘yes’ and ‘amen’ and instead of groping in the darkness into the everlasting darkness of a Christ-less eternity in a place called hell, you can come to the light of Christ where we need sun nor moon for the Lord is the light of our life. That is what God has done in and through His Son and that is why we celebrate His Name. The Bible says all who call upon the Name of the Lord, not can be, but will be saved because when He came He didn’t go to the cross to make salvation possible, He saved His people from all of their sins.

I want you to be numbered with His people and I plead with you to be numbered with His people but only the Spirit of God can move in your heart and allow you to say ‘I leave the darkness and I come to the Light that Christ is the Light of my life for He is the One who dispels the darkness of my sins and I put my trust in Him alone for salvation this day. This day I believe.’ He was born in Bethlehem, I believe. He was raised in Nazareth, I believe. He was baptized at the Jordan, I believe. He was tempted in the wilderness and won the victory, I believe. He taught in Galilee, I believe. He died in Jerusalem at Mount Calvary for my sins, I believe. He was laid in the Garden Tomb and then left there, I believe. He ascended at the Mount of Olives and one day will return there, I believe. Do you believe? Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You for these precious moments that You work in our hearts and lives. For those who know the Savior, God, fill their hearts with joy for Jesus has come into the world to save them and is coming again for them. Father, until He comes may we take this light of the Gospel into the darkness of this world, our city, our state, our nation and may the light of the Gospel so shine there. Dear Jesus if there is anyone reading this today that has not yet come to that Savior, would You dispel the darkness of sin and bring the light of the Gospel of the love of God in Christ and may they call upon the Name of the Lord – Yeshua, Immanuel, save me for I come and surrender to You, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.