

# The Name Above All Names

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please be seated. There's a story that's told of a country vicar who each year would visit the local primary school to share the Christmas story once again with the youngest pupils.

It was a special time for the children, but it was an even more special time for the vicar, who would always put on his best dramatic speaking voice, would bring his favourite book with pictures of stars and shepherds and the baby in the straw.

And he would show the children the pictures with pride and he'd involve them in the narrative, building the suspense and watching as the adoring faces hung on his every word.

This one Christmas, however, things weren't going quite as planned because there was a young boy, a big boy, with an even bigger voice named Derek, sitting in the back of the class.

Derek had begun to fidget and started to kind of call out, first softly, then louder and louder. Finally, the vicar had to stop reading and he said, What's wrong, Derek?

[ 1 : 17 ] I already know this story. Do you? smiled the vicar. Yes, it's about a baby and I know what his name is.

Yes, said the vicar, thinking, oh well, a bit of interaction, that's good. What is his name? His name is Wayne. Uh, no, Derek, said the vicar, I think you're mistaken.

This isn't a story about a baby named Wayne. It's a story about a baby named Jesus. No, it's not, said Derek. His name is Wayne.

I know it is. It most certainly is not Wayne, said the vicar. It is Jesus. It's Wayne, it's Wayne, said the boy, with crossed arms and red face.

I know it is, because we sang about him just before. Ah, Wayne in a manger. Da-da. I've been waiting all year for that one.

[ 2 : 33 ] Names. Despite what Juliet said about Romeo, there is something in a name, isn't there? Those of you who have children here would no doubt attest that choosing a name for your child is a very serious and important task.

My parents were going to call me Timothy Sean, but I'm very glad they took their task seriously and changed their mind when I came out a girl. Otherwise, life would have been rather complicated.

Names are important. They're important. They're important to our identity. They speak to us, of our family, of our background, who we're married to, who our parents are, where we fit in the world.

My husband Phil was so disappointed as a child that he didn't get one of his father's names as his middle name that he added one by deed poll.

Little did he know that he'd then end up having a double-barrelled surname and eventually be called Philip Allen James Curliss Gibson. Try writing that one on a tax form.

[ 3 : 46 ] But he wouldn't have it any other way, would you, darling? Because there is something in a name. Tonight, as we heard again the familiar story of the visit of the angel of the Lord to Joseph in Matthew's Gospel, there was something about the name, wasn't there?

As you heard the story, did you sense the weightiness, the prophetic edge to the name?

A child has been conceived by God's Holy Spirit. And not only is Joseph to take Mary as his wife, despite him knowing that he's not the father, he is also to name the child with a name that God has chosen.

And there's something deeply profound about even this act of naming. Joseph may not be the biological father, but as we heard in Luke's Gospel, he is of the line of David.

And by naming this child, he takes the child into his line, fulfilling all that was promised about the Messiah being a descendant of King David.

[ 5 : 18 ] There's something in that naming. But although Joseph is given that privilege to name the child, he's not given the freedom to name the baby from his own family tree.

This child can't be Joseph Junior or Little Mathen or Jacob like his grandpa. Messiah, this baby is a child of a virgin by the power of God, just as God has promised the Messiah would be.

And only God has the right to choose his name. And so we read in verse 21, she will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

The angel tells Joseph that the name of the child must be Jesus. Or in Hebrew, Yeshua, which means the Lord is salvation or Yahweh saves.

This baby, who will be born in a stable and laid in an animal's feeding trough, is born because the Lord saves.

[ 6 : 38 ] In fact, this baby will be the saviour of the world. The idea of salvation, I think, and a saviour is a difficult one for many of us.

What does it mean to be saved by Jesus? To trust in him as a saviour? Do I even need saving? What would it look like if I did and I was? What difference would it make to my world of nine to five, to my mortgage, to my family?

So sometimes we think perhaps it's better to keep the idea of salvation or a saviour as an abstract one, a vague religious idea or kind of a nice feeling to do with the spiritual part of me, my yearning for the transcendent or the other.

Yeah, Jesus can be saviour, whatever that means for me or for you on a Sunday or at Easter or at Christmas. But what we forget is that as the angel said, salvation is a saving from.

[ 7 : 59 ] It can't be anything else. Think back over the last three or four years, we've seen so many images on the news of people being rescued or saved.

We should know this inside out. Images of people caught in floods in our own country. The news covering disasters in Bangladesh or of course back in 2005, the situation in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

People on rooftops, people on the top of their cars, people stranded, people trapped, people desperate. All needing to be saved.

But all needing to be saved not in the abstract but saved from something. something very real. Saved from rising floodwaters, saved from exposure to the elements, saved from danger of disease, from drowning, from starving, from dying.

And so it is with this child, Jesus, the Saviour. He is not born to be an abstract Saviour.

[ 9 : 25 ] He is born to save people from their sins. Salvation, in a religious sense, is still a saving from.

We need salvation from our sin, from its power over us and from its guilt upon us. To live a life that doesn't measure up to the standards of a holy God as each one of us has done is to incur his just anger.

anger. And to be left to face that just anger because of our sin is to be left in mortal danger.

Whether we know it or not, we are spiritually stranded on top of our car or clinging to the branch of a tree as the floodwaters of judgment and just anger rise as our life moves towards the time when we will face God at his judgment seat.

But even though it would be just and right for God to let his anger fall on us, to let those floodwaters rise, he doesn't do that.

[ 10 : 49 ] He sent a rescuer, a saviour. God sent his only son. In fact, he came himself in human form to take his own anger for us.

That is how Jesus saves from. He averts God's anger from us by taking it upon himself on a lonely cross.

Jesus was born to die to save. His name will be Jesus, the angel says, because he will save his people from their sins.

But just as in a hurricane, those who are saved are not simply saved from. They are also saved to or for something else.

They're not left in limbo forever circling above the floodwaters in a helicopter or just sitting in the boat, rocking up and down, never reaching dry land.

[ 11 : 57 ] No, they're taken to safety. They're flown to the airport for a reunion with loved ones.

They're taken to hospital for medical care.

They're brought to a warm and dry shelter to wait out the storm. And so it is with this baby, Jesus, the Savior.

He was not only born to save us from our sins, he was born to save us for something. And in verse 23, he's given a second name that gives us a clue to what that something is.

look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.

The God of the universe not only longs to see us set free from the power and guilt of sin, but through Jesus Christ, through the birth of that baby, he has set us free for a relationship of love and closeness with him.

[ 13 : 16 ] He saves us because he longs to be with us. Perhaps your background has made you feel that Jesus is a distant being, distracted, powerless, disappointed in you, withholding.

Well, tonight, I'm pleased to say you can be introduced to Jesus by his other name, Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus is God in human form saying, I will do and have done all it takes for you and I to no longer be estranged.

I will come to earth, live your life, face your temptations, experience all your ups and downs, die a criminal's death and rise again to open the way to eternal life with myself.

I am God with you. Through me, you can be in a relationship with the almighty God himself. It's mind-blowing.

And don't think that this is just for the heroes of the faith. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, the rest of us, I like to say, all of us, all people, no matter your background, no matter your life, no matter your sinfulness, can now know God as father and as friend because of that little baby who grew up to save from sin and save for relationship.

[ 14 : 58 ] God can be with you in your joy, in your sadness, in your pain, in your loss, in your work, in your family, in your marriage, in your study, in your hopes and in your dreams.

Knowing Jesus Christ means a relationship with God for eternity, celebrating, living, thriving with him forever in heaven.

So what's in a name? Well, in this case, everything, everything we need, everything the world needs, Jesus, Saviour, Emmanuel, Saviour from our sins and Saviour for an eternal relationship with the living God, God with us, Jesus, the name given to a baby born into such humble beginnings, but the name that would eventually be above all names, the name that would be written for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the only name under heaven by which we can be saved, the name to which all people will one day bow, and a name which can be sweet to your ears tonight and always as you trust in him, Jesus, Saviour, Emmanuel, God with us. Amen. Amen.