

CHRISTMAS EVE - The Importance of a Name

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[0 : 00] About 33 minutes to go, Christmas is here. It's pretty exciting, isn't it? I even got dressed up for the occasion. It's pretty silly on a night like tonight, but anyway, it is cooling down.

And it's even more exciting for us who are part of God's people. For our Christmas time, we particularly remember the birth of Jesus. And what I want to do tonight is to look at the names or the titles that Jesus has given in that passage that John read for us to help us see why his birth is so exciting and worth celebrating.

But first, how about I pray? Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. And we thank you that your word became flesh. That is, Jesus came to earth.

And we particularly remember this at Christmas time. Father, we ask now that you might give us minds to understand your word. And more than that, hearts that would live in light of it. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, births are generally exciting things. Not the actual giving birth part, of course, but the end product, the baby. We've had a number of births here at our church recently.

[1 : 05] In fact, I visited a couple just a few days ago who have just had their first child, a baby girl, and they're very excited. A bit blurry-eyed, understandably, but nonetheless very excited. And one of the things parents do after the birth of their child is to name their child.

I myself was born on Cup Day, 1976. Just hours after I'd been born, and only minutes before the Melbourne Cup started, a journalist barged into my mother's hospital room and asked my mother whether she had remembered to tip a horse for the race that day.

And whether she'd name me after the winning horse. Now, the winner that year was a horse named Vanderham. And so, standing before you tonight, possibly couldn't have been Andrew Price, but rather Vanderham Price, which is actually better than being named after the 1985 winner who was called What a Nuisance.

Thankfully, though, my parents opted for Andrew. But the naming process is part of each birth. It's part of the excitement. There is actually a bit of work involved.

For example, you've got to make sure you get the right name. You've both got to agree on the name to start with, and then you've got to check to see it's not already used by any close relatives or friends.

[2 : 18] And you've got to make sure that the name matches your surname. For example, you don't want to do what one family I know of did. Their surname is MacDonald. And so, can you guess what they call their son?

Ronald MacDonald. True story. I think he now lives in Scotland, far away from any of McDonald's restaurants. But then there's also the meaning of names. This used to be much more important in the past than it is today.

Often today, originality is important. But some people still buy those baby name books. It's one like this one, which tells you the meaning of the names. For example, the meaning of Ruth is compassionate friend, which is nice.

The meaning of Andrew is strong and manly, which is pretty accurate, isn't it, Andrew? That's right. I knew he'd agree. But the point is, there's a bit of work involved in getting the right name.

Yet in our Bible reading tonight, we meet some parents who didn't have this problem. They were actually told what name to give their son, even before he was born. And we are told his name in the very first verse of our reading.

[3 : 24] Have a look there on your pieces of paper. Verse 18, we read this. This is how the birth of Jesus, the Christ, came about.

The very first line, we are told his name is Jesus. And we're going to come back to that name in a moment. But first, notice what else he's called in that very first line. He is called the Christ, which is a title, really like doctor or sergeant or something like that, except Christ means anointed one or king.

In other words, this is the birth of no ordinary child, but the birth of the king. And this fact is actually hammered home in the next chapter of Matthew's book, when wise men bring gifts.

Do you remember? They bring Jesus, not a dummy or a baby toy, rather that they buy Jesus expensive gifts, gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Gifts not fit for a baby, but gifts fit for a king. For that is who Jesus is. Jesus is the Christ or the king. And this is part of what we remember at Christmas time.

[4 : 34] I mean, just think about the word Christmas. It's Christ-ness, if you like. It's about the birth of the king, who is our king, actually, whether we realise it or not.

Christ means king. That's the first name or title I want us to remember. The second one we already know, which is Jesus, but it's not one that the parents chose. And we'll see that soon.

But first, let's meet the parents in the rest of verse 18. It says, His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. But before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

Because Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man, he did not want to expose her to public disgrace. And he had in mind to divorce her quietly. Now, at this point, sometimes our scepticism kicks in because a virgin birth by the Holy Spirit is not something that happens normally, does it? But Matthew knew that too. He knew that as well. And so don't you think that if he was writing a book that he wanted people to believe, that he wouldn't include anything that was hard to believe unless it actually happened?

[5 : 45] Indeed, it had to happen if Jesus was to be both fully God and fully man. Now, what's more, if God created the world, if we believe in a God who can create the world, then he can certainly put a child in a virgin's womb.

After all, he's God, isn't he? And if he couldn't do these sorts of things, then he wouldn't be God. And so this virgin birth shouldn't surprise us that much, really. Though at the time, it no doubt surprised Joseph.

Can you imagine Joseph's reaction? You're what? You're pregnant? But you're still a virgin. Oh, it was God. Right. Actually, the picture we get of Joseph in verse 19 is someone who would have been much gentler than that.

For in verse 19, we're told he did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace. You see, he still cared for her deeply. Nevertheless, this was still an act of adultery.

You see, in those days, the engagement period was much more serious than it is for us today. The proposal was more than just a romantic moment between the two of them. Rather, it was a solemn pledge before witnesses.

[6 : 52] And although the woman, in this case Mary, would have remained at her father's house and there was no sexual union until after the wedding ceremony, the proposal was still legally binding, did you realise?

Such that only death or divorce could end the engagement. That's why in verse 19, Joseph is going to divorce Mary, even though they're only engaged.

And what's more, the start of verse 19 even calls Joseph her husband, even though they haven't had the wedding ceremony yet. You see, they saw the engagement much more seriously than we do.

And so any act of infidelity during this engagement period was considered an act of adultery as it would be in a normal marriage. And so when Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant, he has a problem, doesn't he?

You see, he is a righteous man who took God's law seriously. And God's law took adultery seriously. Yet he also still cared for Mary deeply.

[7 : 49] And so no doubt with tears in his eyes, he comes to the conclusion to divorce her, but to divorce her quietly. Until that is verse number 20. Have a look there.

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.

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. This angel from God tells Joseph to do two things.

First, marry Mary. And second, name the child Jesus. Now at one level, it might seem a little unfair that they couldn't choose a name for themselves. But you see, it was important that this baby, of all babies, got the right name because this baby would grow up to save.

You see, the name Jesus itself means the Lord saves or God saves. And Jesus, who is fully God, would grow up to do just that, to save people.

[9 : 00] And not to save them from fire or floods or some physical danger. No, no. Verse 21 says, you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

Now I'm guessing most of us here have an idea of what sin is. But if we have the next slide, if we write the word like this with a capital I, then it helps us to work out and remember what sin is about. It's about ignoring God and doing what I want, when I want, rather than doing what God wants. See, it's about the I rather than about God.

I mean, when we start our days, we often think about what we want to do, what we need to do, the list of things and so on and so on. But how often do we start the day thinking, what does God want me to do today?

And whether we realise it or not, the Bible says that our sin puts us all in a very real danger of eternal death or what the Bible calls hell.

[10 : 00] A couple of years ago, a friend of ours, whose name is Gavin, he was about 32 years old at the time, he went to the doctor complaining of indigestion or heartburn. The doctor gave him some antacids or some indigestion medicine and said, look, make sure you go to the hospital just in case in the next couple of days just to check out the heart.

When he did go to the hospital, the doctors found that his heart was more than 80% blocked and they rushed him into surgery that same day. They said if he'd waited any longer, then he would have been dead within a week, if not for the surgery which saved him.

This friend of ours, Gavin, had a heart problem and he needed to be saved even though he didn't realise it at the time. And it put him in the very real danger of death. God says sin is our heart problem whether we realise it or not.

And it puts us in the very real danger of eternal death or what the Bible calls hell. Yet Jesus is given his name precisely because he will save his people from all this.

How? Well, by growing up and dying on a cross for us. As many of you know, later on in this book of Matthew, we see Jesus die on a cross for our sins and there suffer the consequences of our sins.

[11 : 20] That is, he suffered hell in our place so that we don't have to, so that we can be saved from it, you see. That's why Jesus was born, that's why he's given the name Jesus and that's what we're to remember at Christmas time.

Now I realise this is rather sobering for what is supposed to be a festive night. In fact, someone once asked me, why is it that some ministers keep talking about Jesus' death at Christmas time? But you see, Jesus was born to die. And it's this that actually makes Christmas truly festive in the first place, did you realise?

For it is by his death that we are saved from sin and headed for an eternity of life in all its fullness. People say Christmas is about peace and goodwill and joy and happiness and all that is true but those things can only truly happen because of this thing here.

For it is by Jesus' death that he brings us true peace between us and God and between one another. And he brings deep joy or happiness knowing that whatever happens we are headed for heaven and eternity of life at its best.

[12 : 32] See, our friend Gavin was so relieved, so happy, excited almost after his heart surgery. Why? Because he knew that he had been saved from death and was now headed for an extended life.

We have been saved though from an eternal death and headed for eternal life. Not even an iPad 2, an iPhone 4S or whatever else gift you are hoping to get tomorrow.

None of that can compete with what Jesus gives us. And so be excited about all the good things that come with Christmas, sure. But don't forget the most exciting thing that Jesus was born to die in order to save you and me from our sins that we who believe might enjoy an eternity in paradise with him.

Of course, we don't have to wait until then to have God with us and enjoy him for in saving us from sin, Jesus also brings us to God such that God is always with us.

And that's the meaning of the third name we're looking at. Have a look at verse number 22. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

[13:46] The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel which means God with us. Now, Matthew tells us here that the name Emmanuel means God with us and he also tells us that this whole event of Jesus' birth actually fulfills an Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah which we heard about from our first reading.

Back in Isaiah this Emmanuel child was a sign that God would judge those who are unfaithful but save his people who were faithful. And so here is Jesus born of a virgin and born to save his people who believe in him.

And so in doing so he fulfills this Old Testament prophecy you see. Except for the fact that the parents don't actually name him Emmanuel do they? But I think in verse 23 where it says they will call him I think the they does not refer to the parents.

I actually think it refers to people whom Jesus saves. People like Matthew who's writing this gospel. People like us who recognise that Jesus is God the Son who is with us by his Spirit.

Do you remember what Jesus said at the end of Matthew's gospel? He said to his people his disciples surely or truly I am with you always to the very end of the age.

[15:16] In other words Jesus is Emmanuel. We call him Emmanuel. We did it literally in our first two carols I don't know if you realised. Jesus is God with us by the Spirit.

But the point here is that Jesus is with us now and that's something worth being excited about. For it means we're never alone we never have to be anxious for God is with us and he is in control and he will help us to heaven.

When I was in primary school we used to play soccer at lunchtime and one of the best soccer players in the school was a man or man he's a boy a boy called Andrew Dale.

He ran so fast that no one could catch him and he had really good soccer skills and so if you were picked to be on his team then you were really excited. Why? Because you knew at that moment you were on the winning team.

If he was with you you knew you'd win and in Jesus God is with us such that we are on the winning team and that's worth being excited about that no matter what life throws at us this side of heaven we can face it and with God's help push through it for in Jesus God is with us to the very end of the age.

[16:35] Well in verse 24 and 25 we see Joseph obey what the angel tells him. Verse 24 Joseph marries Mary gives their son the name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins but do note Jesus only saves his people that is those who believe in him and so I need to ask you are you one of God's people do you believe in Jesus you see one day we'll all stand before God to give an account and if he asks us why he should let us into heaven then it's important that we get the right name for if we say because I Andrew have done these things or I Ruth have done these things or you know your own name it's not going to work we can't save ourselves you see but if we say because

Jesus was born to die for me to save me from my sins then that will work see when it comes to the person we will trust in for eternity it's important that we get the right name too so again do you believe in Jesus let me say Christmas time is a great time to start believing if you don't and if you'd like to then write it on that little slip that Andrew told you about at the beginning in your bulletins tear it off put it in the offertory plate and I'll get in contact with you or come and see me after the service I'd love to speak with you but for those of us who already do believe then is Jesus what you're most thankful for at Christmas time is he what brings you the most joy it's easy to let the other things which are great things don't get me wrong they're great things but it's easy to let those things take over the best thing Jesus see at Christmas time we're to remember that God gave his son to be born to die for us that we might be saved from sin and headed for heaven and what's more in Jesus God is with us even now and so we're on the winning team so why not tomorrow morning before you do anything else why don't you start the day by thanking God for the greatest gift of all for Jesus who was born to die for you though do remember that in Jesus God is not with us simply as a companion kind of like an adult version of a childhood imaginary friend rather he's with us as our loving king who's to be ever obeyed and he is with us as our mighty saviour who's to be ever thanked and so this Christmas let's do both let's obey our king our loving king and thank our saviour

remembering with excitement what we've been saved from and what we're headed for let's pray our heavenly father we do thank you that Christmas time is an exciting time it's a time to exchange gifts a time to spend with family a time to have rest from work father we thank you for these great things but above all these things we thank you for Jesus for the fact that he was born to die that he might save us from our sins father if there are people here tonight who don't believe and are keen to believe we pray that you would work in them help them to believe that like the rest of us they might realise with great thankfulness what we are saved from and where we are headed for and we ask these things in Jesus name amen well given that Jesus is the best thing about Christmas that it does bring joy to the world I thought it might be appropriate that as we sing our next carol joy to the world day you you you you