

What's in a name?

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[0 : 00] Our Heavenly Father, thanks so much for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you speak to us through it and remind us of truths that still impact us today. And so, Father, we pray that you would give us minds to understand your word, but more than that, that you would give us hearts that would seek to live in light of it.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, Christmas is obviously coming and we think about the birth of Jesus.

And births are exciting events, not so much the labour part, but the end product or rather person, the baby. In fact, Booth and Alice were very kind and they timed it just right so that we have an example for us today with the birth of their first daughter, Amelie.

Of course, one of the things that parents do is name their child, like Booth and Alice have done. When I was born, I was actually born on Cup Day in 1976. And just hours after I'd been born, and only minutes before the Cup started, a journalist barged into my mother's hospital room and asked my mother whether she had tipped a horse to win the Cup.

And whether she would then name me after the winning horse. The winner that year was a horse called Vanderhum. And so standing before you this morning could have been Vanderhum Price, which is actually better than the winner in 1985.

[1 : 28] The winner of that year, the horse was called What a Nuisance. Thankfully, though, my parents opted for Andrew. But when naming the child, parents, you know, they agonise over the right name, don't they?

Because names have significance. So many parents want a name that is not too common, because, you know, you're cool parents, after all. And you don't want one that's too unusual, either, that no one knows how to spell.

And then you have to make sure it's not already taken by your immediate family. And then you have to make sure it goes well with your surname. So one family I heard of, their surname is MacDonald. And guess what they called their son? Ronald. True story. He lives in Scotland. And usually the name you do choose has some sort of significance, doesn't it?

I'm guessing your own name had significance for your parents. Sometimes the significance is that the name is taken from a relative or a close friend that you want to honour, or that you want the child to grow up and be like.

[2 : 40] Sometimes the significance of a name is related to an event. Sometimes a happy event, sometimes a sad event. So I doubt many parents living in New Orleans would call their daughters Katrina, after Hurricane Katrina destroyed the city back in 2005.

Sometimes the significance of the name is its meaning. So for example, the name Elijah means the Lord is God. The name Andrew actually means strong and manly.

Isn't that right, Andrew Moody, wherever he is? Yes. You see, names have significance, whether it's the meaning or its connection to another person or to another event in history.

And today we begin our three-week Advent series leading up to Christmas in the book of Matthew. And we're looking at, of course, his birth.

And Matthew gives us actually two descriptions of Jesus' birth. And each description involves a whole stack of names. You would have realised that when Vijay was reading the Bible to us.

[3 : 47] Vijay did well, by the way. Well done. But Matthew's description of Jesus' birth has a whole stack of names, which are also significant. In fact, Matthew gives us two complementary descriptions of Jesus' birth.

So in your Bibles, in verse 1, he literally begins by saying the genesis of Jesus Christ. We've translated that as the genealogy of Jesus the Christ.

But it's literally the genesis of Jesus Christ. That is his origin. And then in verse 18 over the page, he again literally says, not the birth, but the genesis of Jesus Christ.

Same phrase. And so what we have in chapter 1 is two complementary descriptions of Jesus' origin. His birth. And they're meant to complement each other.

And both descriptions have a lot of names, which are significant. Because they tell us about who Jesus is. And what it means for us. So let's have a look at the first description.

[4 : 49] So point 1 in your outline, which will be the longest point. And then verse 1 in your Bibles. So have a look at verse 1. He says, This is the genesis or genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Here, Matthew then begins to list Jesus' family tree, doesn't he? But before he even gets to the family tree in verse 2 and following, we already meet a whole stack of names in verse 1, don't we? And again, these names have great significance for who Jesus is. So let's start with Abraham and work backwards in verse 1, because that's what Matthew does in the following verses. Here Jesus is called the son of Abraham.

That, of course, just means that he's a descendant of Abraham, like all the Jews were. But the name Abraham is meant to remind us of an important event.

And if I said September 11, you'd all know what I was talking about. Well, for Jews, you mentioned the name Abraham, and they knew a particular event that you were talking about.

[6 : 01] And that event was from our first reading, where God made promises to Abraham. God appeared to Abraham and promised him land and offspring and blessing to all nations through one of his descendants.

So on the next slide, here's a verse from our first reading at the top there. The Lord said to Abraham, all peoples, that is nations on earth, will be blessed through you, through one of your descendants.

That's why God gave the name Abraham. Well, it's why he changed his name from Abram to Abraham. See below, from Genesis 17, God says, no longer will you be called Abram, your name will be Abraham.

Why? For I have made you the father of many nations. That's what the word or the name Abraham means. You see, the name Abraham would have reminded the Jews of God's promises here, including the promise to bless many nations through one of Abraham's descendants.

And so by calling Jesus a son of Abraham, here in verse 1, Matthew is saying that Jesus is not any old descendant of Abraham. He is the descendant who would bring about God's blessing to the nations.

[7 : 20] And just so we get the idea, Matthew deliberately includes people from the nations in verses 2 to 6. You see, Jesus had actually more ancestors than those listed in verses 2 to 6.

I'm not going to read out all the names. But Matthew selects some of them and he includes three women which are not normally included in ancient genealogies.

So for example, verse 3, we've got the name Tamar and she was a Canaanite woman. Then in verse 5, we have Rahab whose name is synonymous with Rahab the prostitute from Jericho, but also not from Israel, a foreigner, a Canaanite.

Then if you look in verse 5, there's Ruth, who was from the country of Moab. You see, they are all foreigners from the nations. And yet Matthew deliberately includes these women who are not normally included, who were great women of faith, actually, but he includes them to show that God's blessings are meant for all nations.

God's blessings are for all who, like these three women, have faith in God. Or rather, faith in Jesus, the son of Abraham, the descendant who would fulfil God's promise of blessing to the nations.

[8 : 44] Most parents think their children are special, which is a good thing. I think most children are special too, especially when they're sleeping. They're fantastic. And they're special since they are given by God and made in his image.

But this child is really special because he is the one descendant who would bring God's blessings to the nations, to us.

But there's more. In verse 1, Matthew also calls Jesus the son of David. And the name David was closely associated with kingship. For David was known as Israel's greatest king.

In fact, at the end of verse 6, Matthew makes sure we get the connection. Notice he doesn't just say David, he says King David. You see, the name David reminded the Jews of a great king.

Perhaps like the name Abraham Lincoln would remind Americans of a great president. But more than that, the name David is also meant to remind us of another event where God made some other promises.

[9 : 48] And not about blessing for all nations this time, but about a throne that will endure forever. So on the next slide, God says this in 2 Samuel chapter 7, God says to David, I will raise up your offspring, your descendants, to succeed you who will come from your own body and I will establish his kingdom.

I will be his father, God's going to adopt these kings from David's family, and he will be my son. And your kingdom will endure forever before me.

Your throne will be established forever. And notice two things here. First, God promises that someone from David's family line will always be king.

David's dynasty, his house, his royal line would rule forever. Second, each king from David's family line would be known as a human son of God.

God would adopt the king as his son, if you like. And so when Matthew calls Jesus the son of David back in verse 1, he is saying that Jesus is the king, the son of God who will rule as king.

[11 : 03] And just so we get the point, Matthew then focuses on David's line in verses 7 to 11. And from verse 7 to 11, every single name in that list is the name of a king.

It's as though Matthew doesn't want us to miss out on the fact that Jesus is part of a royal line and that he is the descendant, the son of David who would fulfill God's promise to always have a king ruling.

And just to hammer home Jesus' kingship, the third name Matthew gives us in verse 1 is the name Messiah. And this name basically means king as well. You see the names Messiah and Christ, they both mean anointed one.

And it was kings in particular who were anointed. And so on the next slide, there it is, slightly out of alignment but anyway, Messiah is the Old Testament or the Hebrew name and Christ is the New Testament or the Greek name but they both mean anointed one or king.

We had a kid at J Kids recently who thought that Christ rather is Jesus' surname. It's a very easy mistake to make. I thought the same thing when I was younger as well.

[12 : 19] It makes sense to us. My name is Andrew Price. Price is my surname. So Jesus Christ, Christ must be his surname. Actually, a kid once misheard my name and called me Andrew Christ.

Sounds similar to Price but in reality we're... But of course Christ is a title name like doctor or professor but this title name of Christ means anointed king.

And so King David was a Christ. King Solomon was a Christ and so on. But Matthew is saying here that Jesus is the Christ.

The anointed king. And he shows us this not only by genealogy linking him with David but by repeating the word Messiah three times in this list.

Verse 1, verse 16 and again in verse 17. See Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is not only the son of Abraham who would bring God's blessings to the nations but he is the son of David, the Christ, the promised king.

[13 : 24] The question is why is all this so important? Well because this is who Israel had been waiting for. That's the point of the next group of names after the exile and from verses 12 onwards.

You see under King David and Solomon it looked like those promises to Abraham about blessing and to David about a king always ruling it looked like they had been fulfilled. At the time of Solomon Israel followed God and there was peace and prosperity.

In fact under Solomon silver we're told was as common as stone. That's how much there was. and other nations were blessed through Israel when they came to Israel but then it all went pear shaped.

Israel turned from God and despite 200 years worth of warnings Israel persisted in sin and so they were punished with exile and when they came back from exile things were never the same again. there was little blessing for them let alone for the nations and a descendant of David was not ruling on the throne as king. Instead the Israelites were ruled by other nations the Persians then the Greeks and in Jesus' day the Romans with a Caesar on the throne.

[14 : 46] And so in verses 12 to 15 Matthew gives us names who are mostly unknown in the Old Testament. There are some we do know like Zerubbabel and he was a sort of ruler he was a governor but he wasn't a king.

And so this list of names in verses 12 to 15 are largely unknown with sort of rulers and it's meant to be a picture of an unfulfilled Israel of an Israel still waiting for God's promises to Abraham and David to be fulfilled.

It gives us the reason why Israel was waiting for this Christ this Messiah let me see if I can put the genealogy together and what Matthew's trying to do here so on the next slide this is what he's trying to do with the names verses 2 to 6 all names from Abraham to David with some people from the nations like Ruth and Rahab and so on and these names are meant to show us that Jesus is the descendant the son of Abraham who will bring blessing to the nations and then in the next group in verses 7 to 11 we have the family tree of David to the exile where all the names were kings in David's line and again these names are meant to show us that Jesus is the descendant the son of David who will rule as king but then from 12 to 16 we have the reason why Israel was waiting for this descendant to come because these names are mostly unknown to us and a sort of rulers which shows that Israel is still unfulfilled and only sword of

God's kingdom as it were waiting for God's promises to come true and so when we get to verse 17 in your Bibles it's as though Matthew is saying this Jesus who is born he is the descendant you've all been waiting for he says thus there were 14 generations in all from Abraham to David 14 from David to the exile to Babylon and then 14 from exile to the Messiah he's here there's a lot of speculation about why 14 because there weren't actually literally 14 generations and Matthew's making a point here and I suspect again he's highlighting the fact that Jesus is the promised king you can ask me why later but Jesus is the descendant they were all waiting for we have some friends back in Sydney who had been trying to have a child for five or six years I think it was they came to me and they were asking about the whole IVF thing and the morality of it and so on and after two or three tries on

IVF and thousands and thousands of dollars they finally had a baby boy and they gave him the middle name John which means gift of God this baby boy was the descendant they had been waiting and praying for for years well Matthew is saying that Jesus is the descendant that Israel had been waiting and praying for for hundreds of years but there are a couple of remaining questions like how will this king bring God's blessing to the nations to us and in a list of names that says so and so was the father of so and so why 16 it does not say that Joseph was the father of Jesus it says Mary was the mother of Jesus very different to the rest of the list Jesus is still part of David's line but by adoption with Joseph as his stepfather as it were so the question is who then is

[18:31] Jesus his real father well Matthew answers both these questions with some more names in his second description of the genesis of Jesus so point two we're going to move a lot quicker now verse 18 over the page he says 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 and because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her now this is not an ordinary occurrence is it and no doubt the news came to Joseph as a bit of a shock Joseph was engaged to Mary it's actually stronger than that they were betrothed they were legally bound to each other which is why in verse 19 Joseph is still called her husband and talks about divorce even though they're not yet officially married but can you imagine

Joseph's reaction you're what you're pregnant of course the picture we get of Joseph in verse 19 is someone who was not only faithful to the Lord which meant divorcing Mary he was kind because he wanted to do it quietly so that she was not publicly disgraced but then something happened to Joseph see verse 20 to 25 but after he 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 all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they the his wife but he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus here we see both answers to our questions before don't we at first we see Jesus real father is God because twice we are told that he is conceived by the Holy Spirit and in verse 25 we are given another name the name Emmanuel which means God with us you see while every king from David's line was adopted as a son of God Jesus is actually the son of God the one who is best equipped to rule as king I mean everyone in David's line was a human king but in Jesus we have a king who is both man and God one who can rule forever and secondly also see how this king will bring God's blessing to all name the name Jesus see verse 21 again we heard about it in the kids

talk you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins Joseph still gets to name his son but he is told what name to give and it's the name

Jesus which means the Lord saves because as we heard that's exactly what this child would grow up to do to save their people from their sins how well this king did not lord it over us but he died for us and when he died on the cross he took the punishment for our sins so that we could receive those promised blessings blessings like forgiveness and life eternal Jesus would bring God's blessings to all nations to all who like those women had faith or trust in him and this is what makes Christmas so joyful for it's the time we especially remember the birth of a boy who grew to be a man and died for us to forgive us to reconcile us to bring us here in Melbourne us who are from the nations God's blessings like life eternal it's why we sung our first carol today glory to the newborn king but peace on earth and mercy mild

God and sinners reconciled and so can I ask you do you know this mercy are you reconciled to God do you know God's blessings of forgiveness and new spiritual life now with the certainty of new physical life later in heaven in other words do you believe in Jesus the Christ you see Jesus is the descendant the only one who fulfills God's promises and so he's the only one we must believe in and accept as our king and savior have you done that for us who have then just four very quick things as we finish first does Jesus still bring us joy at Christmas I mean this is a crazy time of year isn't it I mean if you are not and so we can forget how great Christmas actually is or sometimes we can get excited but our excitement is more about having a holiday or presents and we can forget to pause and thank

[24 : 01] God for Jesus but is Jesus still the reason for our joy that God would send his only son into the world the promised king to die so that we could receive God's blessings it's still worth rejoicing over isn't it second we had to continue submitting to Jesus as our king because that's who he is I mean Matthew has really tried to show this hasn't he I will think more about this next week but can I just say thank you to you for still making Jesus a priority in your life because as I said this is a busy time of year and often the first thing to go is prayer and Bible reading and church which means Jesus is not so much a king who determines your priorities but an optional extra there are some people who are like that and so thank you for not doing that for still treating him as king thirdly we have to remember that we are not alone as we seek to live for

Jesus as our king he is Emmanuel God with us by the spirit he helps us live for him and so do keep coming to God in prayer through Jesus to ask for help each day to keep living for our king again life is busy I know but it's actually all the more reason then to make time to pray that we don't forget Jesus that we don't stop treating him as the king and saviour he is and fourthly and blessings to all nations then are we seeking to share Jesus with all nations so that they too can enjoy God's blessings have you got someone in mind to invite to a Christmas service this year or at least praying for someone I was really encouraged recently in fact just past week where someone from our church wanted to grab a whole stack of those green invite cards to the Christmas Eve for kids service and give them to a local shop owner that he's built a rapport up with over the years he knows the shop owner has some young kids and so he's going to go invite him

I think he's going to ask if the shop owner can leave someone his counter give them out to others for another they are hoping to go to their Christmas party so that their friends will in king who brings God's blessings to all nations if there is no other name by which people can be saved then he is the one way to proclaim that's where Matthew ends his gospel as he echoes some of these themes we've seen today so just on the last slide this is what Jesus Matthew says in the last part of his gospel so just on the next slide I think no it's not there okay it's not on the next slide let me read it to you Jesus said all authority has been given to me I'm the king therefore go and make disciples of all nations

I am the son of Abraham and surely I am with you always I am Emmanuel God with us you see these names not only tell us who Jesus is and what he has done they also encourage us to do something about it that's why I chose this verse from Matthew 28 to be our church vision statement which is on the front of your newsletters to be those who make disciples of all nations so do pray and invite if you have the opportunity well I'm guessing that all our names were significant to our parents who chose them but Jesus name son of Abraham son of David Christ Emmanuel Jesus they're even more significant names they tell us who he is and what he has done and so there is no other name that we are to bow to there is no other name that we are to rejoice in more than the name Jesus

Christ our Lord let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for this season with reminder of Jesus birth but we thank you also for Matthew's two descriptions of his beginning with all these names that remind us that Jesus is no ordinary person but he is indeed the descendant who fulfills your promises he is the one who is king he is the one who brings your blessings of forgiveness and life eternal to us and so father we pray that you would help us to continue to rejoice in him and to continue to serve him we ask it in Jesus name amen