

Born with a Mission

Matthew 1:18-25 (New American Standard Bible)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, since he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. ²⁰ But when he had thought this over, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a Son; and **you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.**” ²² Now all this took place so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: ²³ “Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him **Immanuel,**” which translated means, “God with us.” ²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, ²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and **he named Him Jesus.**

Introduction

Thirteen years ago, there was a newspaper article on a three-year-old boy whose first and middle names were *Adolf Hitler*. To celebrate his birthday, the parents ordered a birthday cake from a local ShopRite store whose manager refused to spell out the boy’s name on the cake, so the family ended up ordering the cake from another store. His younger brother’s first and middle names were *Aryan Nation* (December 17, 2008, Asbury Park Press). Although we respect the parents’ right to name their sons with whatever names they choose, I cannot imagine what kind of challenge the boys will grow up with in the future.

Anyway, this morning, we will think about the name of Jesus and His mission—why He came to earth 2,000 years ago.

Content

In the Scriptures, I noticed that when God works with His people, He sometimes begins the work early on with their birth. E.g. Moses (*‘drawn out of the water’*—Exodus 2:10). God worked with the same Moses for the next 120 years to lead the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land. God sometimes gives certain individuals a brand-new name, too. E.g. from Abram (*exalted father*) to Abraham (*father of multitude*). From Jacob (*swindler*) to Israel (*wrestled with God*). In Jesus, God did them both. That is, God began His work in Jesus with the birth and the name—the *virgin birth and the name Jesus to the baby*.

Let’s think about the name Jesus first. By the way, some people use the name Jesus in vain without realizing what they are saying and its ramifications. E.g. Some movies. Be

careful how you say His name. Always say the name Jesus with reverence. Never use His name either casually or as a swear word. Remember this: God takes His name very seriously and commands us not to use it in vain in the Ten Commandments: ⁷“*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain* (Exodus 20:7).

In the same way, the LORD God will also hold accountable those who disrespectfully speak the name Jesus, because Jesus is also the Lord of lords and King of kings (Deuteronomy 10:17, Revelation 17:14).

The name ‘Jesus’ means ‘God saves’ (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is a direct English transliteration of the Greek name ‘Ιησους’ (pronounced, *Ye-sou-s*). *Ιησους* is the Greek counterpart of the Hebrew name ‘Yeshua’ (יהושע)—‘Joshua’ in English. ‘Yeshua’ means ‘the LORD saves.’ God sent His Son ‘Yeshua’ to the world with a mission—to save people from their sins through His own death on their behalf—we call it ‘redemption through atonement’ (Ephesians 1:7-8).

Imagine Jesus growing up with the very name ‘God saves.’ From His youth, He would never forget His mission on earth. Not even a day. He came down to earth from heaven to save humanity from their sins. Every time He was called by the name Yeshua, either by His earthly parents or friends, He was constantly reminded of His task ahead: *I am going to save people from their sins.*

Let’s think about the nature of salvation—the salvation plan God had in mind. Let me tell you: it was not an easy task. I am sure Jesus was fully aware of what kind of salvation He was going to accomplish. It was not a temporal political liberation from Rome (although that’s what people wanted), but a spiritual and eternal liberation from the bondage of sin and fear of death. *Through His own death on the cross.*

Of course, the enemy the devil never liked God’s purpose for Jesus. So, in order to derail God’s salvation plan, the devil kept tempting Jesus so as not to fulfill God’s plan. E.g. The first temptation came in the wilderness (Matthew 4:8-10): the devil offered Jesus all the glory and splendor of earthly kingdoms in exchange of worship. *Just bow down and worship me, the devil tempted Jesus, and I will give you all the glory of earthly kingdoms.* Jesus replied, *get behind me, Satan, I will worship only one God, the LORD, not you.* Another time, Jesus was so popular among the crowds that they wanted to make Him king by force (John 6:15). It was right after He fed thousands of people with bread and fish. Of course, Jesus wanted no part of it. The last temptation came to Him when He was hung on the cross. The devil spoke through the mouths of crowd. Jeering at Jesus, the crowd demanded Him to come down from the cross: *Save yourself! Aren’t you in agony and pain? Come down from the cross and we will believe that You are the Son of God* (Matthew 27:40)! He had to endure and overcome all these trials and temptations.

The road to salvation was never easy. No, not at all. In fact, it was getting harder and harder as the time of crucifixion approached. His inner struggle culminated in His prayers at the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before crucifixion. *‘Remove the cup from Me, Father,’* Jesus prayed three times in a row. His prayer was so intense that His sweat turned into blood: *being in agony, He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground* (Luke 22:44).

Don’t get Jesus wrong. He was not afraid of physical death. Rather, He was overwhelmed with the upcoming separation from His Holy Father. Never ever was He separated from His Father until then. Yet, that was about to happen on the following day.

Did you know that by carrying the sin of the world to the cross, Jesus became a curse before the Holy God? From the purest, the sinless, beloved Son of God, to the ugly and dark sin itself? That day, the holy and righteous God totally turned His head away, even from His beloved Son, because Jesus became the sin of the world and paid the wages of sin through His own death. That’s why on the cross, Jesus cried out, *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* (Matthew 27:46).

The last word Jesus said on the Cross was “It is finished” (John 19:30). “It is finished” is one word in Greek: τετελεσται (te-te-le-s-ta-i). This word was not strange to the common folks at the time. In fact, everyone understood it because it was a legal term commonly used in the debtor’s prison. E.g. When the debt was fully paid off, a certificate was given to the debtor on his way home out of jail. On the certificate, one word was written: τετελεσται (te-te-le-s-ta-i). *Finished. Completed. Fulfilled.* You are free from the debt. No more debt. No more imprisonment. You are free.

In the same way, Jesus’ last word on the cross has a two-fold meaning for us. First, by saying so, Jesus meant, “Father, I have *completed* my task on earth.” I have saved humanity from their sins through My death. Next, My own death has paid the wages of their sin—*fully and completely*. He declares to humanity, “*You are free from sin and death.*” Nothing more is needed to complete the salvation of humanity. He did it all. τετελεσται (te-te-le-s-ta-i).

Conclusion

As we go through the season of Advent, let us reflect on the meaning of Christmas. Christmas is all about Christ’s birth, isn’t it? The reason for the season is Christ Jesus. The name, *Jesus*, means ‘God saves.’ God sent His Son, Jesus, to save **us** all from our sins through the death of His Son on the cross. 2,000 years ago, for this very mission, Jesus came to earth and completed His mission on the cross by dying on our behalf. He set us free totally and completely from sin and death.

No longer is Jesus just a cute little baby in a manger, but He is the Son of God the Messiah, who died for all of us. That’s why Christmas is so special to us. That’s why Christ is

our joy. To all of us. To all the world. *Christ is the Joy of the world.* Let's have Him this Christmas in our hearts.

Amen.