

What's In A Name?

Luke 2:21

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

What's in a name? There are classic names like John, Robert, William or Mary, Barbara, Helen. Now a days we get some a little different, Dakota, Maddox, Shyanne or Bree. Many times the names of children reflect the prevailing fad of the time when they were born. Sometimes parents will name children after other relatives or friends in a way to honor them. There was a time, however, when names were used not for the sound of it but because of what the name meant. Back in 1st Century Palestine, traditional Hebrew parents carefully selected names for their offspring that would express their faith in God or their hopes for the child. Names meant something: like John meaning "God has been gracious". Or Isaiah meaning "God has saved". Or Matthew being a "Gift of God".

Today, on the 8th day after we celebrated the birth of Christ, the church marks the Naming of Jesus. On this day son of Joseph and Mary was taken to the temple and given the name Jesus. On this day the law of the chosen people would be fulfilled, as it is written that all descendants of Abraham shall on the eighth day be circumcised as a sign of the covenant of old. In the same manner, Jesus is taken to the temple and the law is fulfilled and the commitment is made. In this way we are reminded that Jesus was following human customs and is named just as other male children of his day would have been, but in his name we also remember that he was special, that this naming of Jesus was chosen. Of all names none is more precious in Christian ears than the name of Jesus. It is **unique, prophetic, realistic, and powerful**. Luke writes in his Acts of the Apostles, that there is **no other name under heaven given among all people by which we must be saved. Jesus is that Name, it is special for many reasons.**

First off because it is a **UNIQUE** name. "You shall call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" is what the angel says. That is quite literally what the name of Jesus means – God Saves. The name Jesus means Savior. What an designation! What a hope and meaning, tied right to him from the very beginning. Now he wasn't the only one to have that name, it is not unique in that way, because anyone wanting to make a case for themselves or for their own child that they are the Savior that Israel had been waiting for would select that name also. In this 1st century B.C. 1st Century A.D., the name Jesus would have been frequently by parents in the hope that perhaps their son might be the Messiah, the Savior. Matthew's Gospel even gives us an example of the day, remember Jesus Barabbas – He was a revolutionary leader who was imprisoned in Jesus day for leading and uprising. The people

wanted a revolution from their dictators and they wanted that Savior, so the mob's before Pilate call for that Jesus instead of Jesus of Nazareth, who ends up going to the cross and winning a Salvation for all people, but as yet most the world didn't understand that form of Savior.

So the name isn't unique in that way, but rather because it is the only name by which we are Saved. There is no other name by which we can be saved. It is by the very manner, by the very name that we are saved, the name Jesus is God Saves. This One who is "conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary", this one, heralded by the angels of heaven, only he could assume that name, for he was sent to this world to be the Savior of All People for God, his Father. No one else could save us from sin, no one else was capable of delivering us from the wrath of God for our sins that are due us. After all the centuries of laboring, praying, and preparing, "God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the Law." The unique Jesus submitted to the Law, identifying with the sinful mankind he came to save, enduring the Jewish covenant ceremony of circumcision and receiving that unique name which summarized the authority, the commission, the work of salvation only he could perform.

But the name Jesus is also a PROPHETIC name. The very fact that an angel from heaven brought that name to Mary and Joseph shows us the involvement of the Heavenly Father in revealing to us the Man and his mission. God is pointing through that name to the important work his only begotten son is sent to complete. He is born into the world of this Law, to overcome the laws that had failed to save. Only by this hope that had been planned would the hope of the Prophets be fulfilled. Since Moses first gave the Law to the people, they sinned. For that matter before the gift of the ten commandments, mankind sinned going all the way back to the garden of Eden. But ever since that time humanity waited for the fulfillment of the Prophetic message that one is coming who will plead to God on our behalf. Jesus becomes that one who fulfills those hopes of reconciliation, that brings us back into keeping with God's way. He came not to refine the Law, update it, or make it easy to live with. He came to save us from it. He came to deliver us. He came to destroy the law's power to punish and condemn. Peter said it in his speech in Acts 10:43: To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

And Jesus is a REALISTIC name. God chose a name for his Son that addressed itself to our needs. Despite the fact that the people of Jesus' day, and perhaps many of us today, wanted a different understanding of God, Jesus comes to save us from our sin. People were so much opposed to his mission that they stood in opposition to him over and over again, to this day people reject him, because they don't want to believe and receive that grace of forgiveness

of sins. Many people of his day and today, have their own agenda's and have their minds on earthly things of this world, of the flesh, of means and wealth and power, all things that are limited and will end. Jesus knew they wanted to take him by force and make him king. They wanted the power of David, and they wanted the throne to be in the seat of Israel and away from Rome. They wanted the riches, the power, the freedom, the grandeur of the old Israel. But God was realistically acting not for their earthly existence but for the eternal souls. Jesus came to those who were sick, full of sin, oppressed and living with out hope to give us a hope that can never be taken away. By his name we are given a grace and a promise of love that is eternal in the Kingdom of God. That is the realistic goal that we should be concerned for and aspire to be a part of now and always, not things that will end, but things of God.

Which leads us to the last image we get for the name of Jesus, Power. In that name, all those who believe are radically changed, all of humanity, the world, creation itself is radically changed. In the name of Jesus we see the Power of God that is true and deserves worship and mission. In one name, the church was born. In that name people risked their lives to go forth to share the good news of Jesus Christ. In that name people risked embarrassment, harassment, punishment, to share the love of God with friends, neighbors and strangers alike, so that they also can come to believe and be saved. We evangelize, we share the love of God, we share our faith with others as the church, as Christians because the power of that name compels us to want others to know the hope and the peace that we know and have found in this place, in God's family.

This is the reason the church exists, the reason we gather here, the reason we have hope and faith. By that name that is truly unique, prophetic, realistic and powerful, by that name of Jesus we are healed, saved, claimed and sent with a mission to share the faith. By that name we know we are God's people, just as Luke says there is **no other name under heaven given among all people by which we must be saved. Jesus is that Name. Let us give thanks this day. Amen.**

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.