**Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-31 Dec. 25, 2022**

**Phil. 2:5-11**

**What Jesus Brings: Salvation**

Last night we read the same Scripture verses from Matthew’s gospel and I spoke about Immanuel, God’s real presence. *The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”),* Matt. 1:23.

Because of the birth of Jesus, fully divine and fully human, we can know not only what God thinks, but also how God feels. God isn’t out there somewhere, or over there … a distant, aloof Creator or concept. God came among His people, in the flesh, in Jesus of Nazareth, and we know this from history. God is still with us in Jesus, and we know this because of His resurrection. He walks with us in our pain, in our joy, in our dark times, and in our jubilant times.

This morning - Christmas Day, this day we mark as Jesus’ birth, a day in history when the Almighty God humbled Himself to enter our world as a baby - I want to say a bit more about God-With-Us and the meaning of His given name.

**The Power of Naming**

What’s in a name? If you have children, no doubt you gave thought to naming them. Have you ever thought about your name … it’s meaning … why you were given it? Some people don’t like their name … sometimes names can be a source embarrassment. For others, their name is a source of pride. There is a power in naming … a name can guide a destiny.

Made a little lower than the angels, God gave His power to name to humans. *Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name,* Genesis 2:19.

Mary and Joseph did not have to ponder what name would be given their son. They didn’t need to try out a few names to hear how they sounded. The baby's name would not actually be "Immanuel." That title came later, when people saw what He did and heard what He said. It just seemed as though they were seeing and hearing God. He was acclaimed by many to be Immanuel. When people reflected on who He was the names foretold by Isaiah came to mind: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,* Isaiah 9:6.

**The Power Of His Name**

Yet, this child, born to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, entered the world with a name already attached. The name of this baby was so important to God, that God Himself selected it. God left most naming of people, creatures and things to humans, as we noted earlier (Gen. 2:19). But God wanted to name this special child Himself.

The angel Gabriel visited Mary saying to her, *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,* Luke 1:31. The angel gave this same message to Joseph, *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,* Matt. 1:21. For this child, conceived by the Holy Spirit, there is only one name that will do, and that is Jesus. Jesus … the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua, or Yeshua. This name is still well-known among the faithful, for Joshua was one of the great heroes of the Old Testament. Many Jewish parents named their sons after him. So, Jesus’ given name was quite common – how fitting for the baby who would become the Servant King. And yet, the name Joshua was a constant reminder to the Jews of the Hebrew word for salvation… which is Yeshua. How fitting for God had a purpose for this baby: *he will save his people from their sins.* He was most uncommon, for He brings to all people the possibility of renewed life, freed from our prison of sins.

**The Name Above All Names**

Jesus was actually a nobody in the wider world of His day, but there has never been a person like Him in history. The really big name when He was born was Augustus Caesar – Emperor of Rome. His armies had defeated Brutus, who betrayed and killed Julius Caesar, and he had defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra – rivals for power. During his 44-year reign His name was known throughout the Roman world, and his image appeared on statues everywhere. But if it were not for his connection with the “nobody” of his age, Augustus Caesar would be all but forgotten, except to historians. The emperor’s name appears in the world’s most influential book. The Bible records: *In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world,* Luke 2:1. It was his decree that brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. And it is these two common people, with very common names, whom we remember, because their names are forever connected with the name above all names. At Bethlehem there took place the most amazing birthday the world has ever seen. Though barely noticed at the time, this is the only birthday that is still celebrated by the majority of the world’s people. God expects your personal life to be a Bethlehem (see Oswald Chambers May 31).

If you look at the first chapter of the gospel of Matthew, you’ll see a genealogy of Jesus … a long list of names from the Old Testament. In a way these names sum up the Old Testament. These were the people God used to make history and to fulfill His plan to bring His Son into history. Those names are leading to the final name. Jesus had no children and so the list ends with Him. His is the last name in God's plan because He completed the plan. His name crowns the biggest mission in the universe, the mission to save lost humanity for eternity. No name in history is more fitting for the Son of God than the name of Jesus, for it means Savior, and He was and is the only Savior of humankind.

One of our favorite Christmas hymns is “Hark The Herald Angels Sing.” Funny how that came about … An 18th century printer needed a hymn to fill an empty space the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer. He found a Christmas poem that he thought was just right. It was written by Charles Wesley. The printer did not know that the Church of England frowned upon anything written by Charles or his brother John Wesley. So, this hymn got included in the Church of England’s prayer book, though when discovered it was removed from later editions. Nonetheless, William Cummings found that it fit well with a tune by Felix Mendelssohn, and he published it as “Hark The Herald Angels Sing,” which became one of the most beloved Christmas carols of all time. It exalts the name of Jesus, and we remember the names of Wesley and Mendelssohn because they are connected with the name of Jesus. The degree to which we have a truly Christian Christmas will be the degree to which we honor and exalt His wondrous Name.

If you want to make a name for yourself, attach your name to that which exalts Jesus. Your name may not become well-known in your lifetime, but any name linked to His will be written down in glory in the Lambs book of Life and will be known for all eternity. As it says in the last book of the Bible, *They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads…* Revelation 22:1-5.

Do you know this wondrous Savior named Jesus? That is the eternal question. Jesus Himself said, *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent,* John17:3. Salvation in Jesus is not true for some and untrue for others. It is either true for all or for none at all.

This Christmas we have a choice. We know Jesus who saves us from our sins, and we know Emmanuel, the “with us God.” So, are we going to let others know that God in Christ Jesus has made a difference in our lives, or is our Christmas just going to be like all the commercials? We can go along with the rest of the world, or we can join the angels, by becoming messengers who shine light into the darkness of a sinful world. The choice is ours; this is our story – the truth for all - to tell. … *you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...* I Cor. 6:11.

Those who put their trust in this, the only name under heaven by which we must be saved, will bear that name forever.

*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,*Philippians 2:8-11.

His name is praised on earth and in heaven. His name is above all names and will be for all eternity.

[In some parts of the world the name of Jesus is still used for others but for most of the Christian world this name has been kept exclusive for the Son of God. It therefore did not become a popular name. But all who are connected with Jesus had names that became the most famous ever. Mary for girls and John for boys are the two most popular names because of their connection with the name of Jesus.]