

“What’s In A Name?”

CHRISTMAS EVE

December 24, 2018

10:00pm Service

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Throughout the last years of my ministry
here at Grace Lutheran Church,
I have prepared a different sermon
for each of our Christmas Eve services.

This practice began when one of our choir
members-his name will remain anonymous-
swiped my hand-written manuscript
from the pulpit forcing me to ‘wing-it’
like the angelic choir in Luke’s vision
of the Christmas story.

Since I am in the habit of spending much
study time with the biblical text
I am preaching on- the loss of a
manuscript was neither a source for
panic nor despair-to me-it was a
needed challenge.

Another challenge for a preacher on Christmas
Eve is the worshipers gathered for a
joyful Christmas celebration.

Scott’s tremendous musical talent and
our beautifully decorated and candlelit
sanctuary provides just the right
environment that a pastor’s message
cannot compete with and rightfully to
I have learned that Christmas Eve sermons
cannot be too long or too theological-
adults like children on Christmas Eve
are impatient and excited to get home
for Christmas.

So tonight, I am going to be brief and
as public speech teachers encourage-to the point.

The point of Matthew's short birth story of
Jesus is to prepare the reader for the
gospel to follow.

With the introductory story, Matthew offers
us a fresh look at the many ways
God is revealed to us,
often in unexpected places and persons.

Take Mary, Joseph, and then child.

They look like a lot of other folks of their time,
and a lot like us.

In this text we see that God uses
what looks insignificant to reveal
what is significant.

Matthew's purpose is to demonstrate that
Jesus is by virtue of Joseph's naming
a son of David and by Mary's pregnancy
and delivery a son of Abraham-
a person like us.

Matthew's story is packed with meaning
and purpose:

God is active in history.

Mary is an instrument of God's grace.

Joseph is portrayed as a man who trusts in God,
and Jesus is Emanuel-God with us.

At the center of the story is
an overwhelming experience of believing.

This is what Christmas is all about

Another key to understanding Matthew's
version of the Christmas story comes in
the names of its three major characters
as they appear in order in the text:
Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.

For Matthew, names must speak louder
than words, because, Mary, Joseph,
and, of course-the baby Jesus-speak no words.

Names are special, even in our own day
of seemingly untraditional and unusual

children's names.
Even our family was surprised two weeks
ago when our third grandchild was
born and named.
I was already anticipating him to be named
Owen Clark Rickards and getting used to
telling others that we have three
grandchildren-Harper, Graham, and Owen-
almost proper English names.
However there was room for doubt
when our daughter-in-law suggested,
that she might name her child
according to what she saw in him at birth.
The name Beau took us by surprise,
but when we saw his first pictures,
we could understand why she chose Beau
as in B-E-A-U a beautiful baby boy.
So Beau he is and hopefully Beau he will become.

The importance of names is a powerful and
significant theme throughout the Bible.
Names convey either a physical feature
like Beau's or a powerful statement about God.
Take for example the names of the Old
Testaments two major prophets-Moses and Elijah.
Moses literally means "draws-out"
and Elijah translates "the Lord is my God"
Moses was placed in a waterproof basket
to escape Pharaoh's decree that Hebrew male
babies were to be killed to decrease their
threat to Egypt's security.
Ironically, he is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter
and names Moses, who will later draw out
God's people from slavery in Egypt.
And it is no surprise that Elijah grows up
to become the prophet who worshipped Yahweh
alone and refused to bow down to false gods.
In the New Testament we come upon Peters
who is nicknamed "the Rock" by Jesus

and the early evangelist Barnabas- who lived up to his name as the “encourager”

Tonight’s text informs us that Joseph is instructed to name Mary’s child, thus legally adopting him as his son and as his lineage as a son of David,

Then there is his name, Jesus.

There is a contemporary gospel song that sings, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus... there is something about that name”

Indeed there is-

The name Jesus, as we will come to learn about in his life, ministry, death, and resurrection means “savior” “The Lord’s helper”

That is the good news of Christmas- Jesus is our Savior, our Redeemer, our Reconciler our means of salvation.

Let’s not also forget the other two names that appear in Matthew’s birth story- Mary and Joseph.

What do their names tell us?

Did you know that Mary’s name in Hebrew means “bitter”?

Let’s face it, her pregnancy and the scandal it could have raised- would have left Mary a very bitter person.

But that’s not the way she took it.

According to Luke, when Mary received the news that she would soon carry and give birth to a baby boy named Jesus, she didn’t wail in despair but she broke out in song “From now on everyone will consider me highly favored” (1:48).

And she was right.

Her name would never mean “bitter” again but “blessed”

And Joseph, his name, in Hebrew meant, “the Lord will add”

this name means that God will give more.
When it comes to our own salvation,
 we do not have enough,
 we can't do this on our own.
But God will give us more.
And in the person of the child named
 Jesus, God gives us more, God gives us grace.
 God gives us life and salvation.
Jesus "the one who saves"
Emmanuel "God with us"
 the greatest gift of Christmas
 who comes to use as one of us
 and leads us through all the days of our lives.
What's in a name?
In Jesus' name- everything.

AMEN