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Matthew 1:21-2:2 “The Names of Jesus”

Intro. Is anyone unhappy with your first, middle, or last name? If you don't ever use one of your names, you probably don't like it! I am happy with my names. I am named after Stephen Felker, the patriarch of our family who was born in 1799. Stephen was the first faithful martyr of the Christian church. My middle name is Frederick. I didn't care for that name until I realized I was named after my grandfather, whom I loved dearly. I'm fine with Felker, but for some reason I have to spell it out to people so often! Mary Patton just had a birthday. She was born on Christmas day. No one should be surprised that her parents named her Mary. Drew and Eunice are awaiting the birth of their child. They are going to name her Abigail, which means, “my father's joy.” All parents need to give careful consideration regarding the name they give their child, for a name will either help or hurt that child in life.

In Bible times a name was even more significant because a name was not just given as a means of identification, but every name had an obvious meaning, which was intended to reflect that person's character or desired destiny. I think it is significant to consider the names and titles that were given to Jesus at His birth. It is clear from the text that in His case, they served as prophecies, telling us about who He is, and what He had come to do.

What I want to do this morning is to lead you in a consideration of the names of Jesus given in this text of Matthew's Gospel as we consider the significance of Jesus' coming into the world. First and foremost, His name was:

I. JESUS

Normally in that day, the father named the child, so in v.21 Joseph was instructed to name Mary's baby “Jesus.” However, in this case, God the Father picked out the name for His Son Jesus. What a lovely name—the name of Jesus. The Greek name (Ἰησοῦς), Yesus, was equivalent to the Old Testament name “Joshua,” or *yeh-ho-shoo'-ah* (cf. Heb. 4:8). In that day, many a Jewish boy was named Jesus, or Joshua. So consider with me:

A. The Meaning of His Name - The meaning of the name “Jesus” is very significant. It means “Jehovah is salvation.” Most Jews were looking and longing for salvation from the power and oppression of the Roman Empire. But we see here in our text that He was to be a spiritual Savior first and foremost. That is why the angel went on to explain why the baby was to be named Jesus, “for He will save His people from their sins.”¹ This is the first mention of sin in the New Testament. The word literally means to miss the mark as with an arrow and points to the fact that we all have failed to obey God. We have broken His laws and deserve death. So even from the meaning of His name we see that Jesus is the One God sent to save us from our sins. This wonderful name touches the very heart of the mission and message of the Messiah. This also tells me He is the only One who can save you from your sins. Jonah said, “Salvation is of the Lord” (2:9). Acts 4:12 says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other

¹ Psalm 130:8 says concerning the Lord, “He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities (LXX, ἀνομιῶν).”

name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (KJV). You cannot save yourself.

Why is salvation from sin our greatest need? Well, the root cause of all of our problems is sin. By prayer and divine intervention Jesus may save us from sickness, from danger, or from other problems, but our most pressing and long-term need is to be saved from sin. And since sin brings suffering and death, it should be clear that Jesus was born to suffer and die. That is the only way He could save us from our sins.

I would also point out that the angel said, “He *will* save His people....” He did not say, “He may save His people,” but “He *will* save His people....” You can count on Jesus to be your Savior if you will only acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

Let us reflect upon the fact that Jesus was born to be a Savior. That’s the message of Christmas. Since we are all sinners, God sent His Son to save us from our sins. He died for your sins on the cross. He offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will believe in Him. If you have not yet received the forgiveness of sins, then you should trust in Christ and receive one of the greatest gifts possible this Christmas, which is forgiveness of sins, and the sure hope of eternal life.

Not only would Jesus be able to save us from the *penalty* of sin, but also the *power* of sin! We can overcome sinful habits in our lives through the power of Jesus Christ. I am still a sinner, but I’m not the sinner I used to be! I hope you can say the same thing through the saving power of Jesus Christ.

B. The Exaltation of His Name - What a wonderful name is Jesus! Today it is rarely given to any other, for no one else is worthy to bear that name. Philippians 2:9-10 says, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow....”

So let us respond to His saving work and exalted position with a life of gratitude and obedience. We see right here in our text that Joseph was obedient to the Lord. We read in the last of v.25, “And he called His name JESUS.” He was obedient to the angel. He normally would have given the child a family name. Instead, he gave Him the name Jesus, in obedience to the command of the angel.

Another name given to Jesus at His birth was:

II. IMMANUEL

We have no record of Jesus ever being called “Immanuel” by His family or followers. Instead, this is a messianic title, for in v.23 we see that Matthew indicates that the birth of Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isa. 7:14, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’” In the Greek “with us” is placed first for emphasis. Furthermore, the Greek word translated “with” (*meta*) means “face to face with.” The selection of this word (rather than *sun*) shows better that God wanted close association and fellowship with us. Sin separated us from God, but Jesus came to enable us to have a close relationship with God. Isn’t it amazing that the high and holy God of the universe would come down to us by becoming one of us! John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

What does this name mean for us? It means that:

A. Jesus Is God – Since His prophetic name means “*God* with us,” then we have here a powerful statement of the deity of the Messiah! This also means that He reveals God to us like no other. The day would come when He would say to Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...” (Jn. 14:9).

Argumentation: Is there good reason to believe that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ? Did God actually become a man, or is this just a fanciful Christmas story? Is this story of God becoming a baby, and then a man, similar to Greek mythology? Or did this actually happen? What I proclaim today is sober truth. I believe there is strong evidence that God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. How do we know Jesus is God? The fact that Jesus was virgin born, as stated in vv.20 & 23, justifies the fact that He was called Immanuel (see also Luke 1:35). His virgin birth was a miracle. He could not be Immanuel any other way! During His ministry He did miracles that only God could do, even raising the dead! Furthermore, only the God-man could have lived a sinless life, so that He would not die for His own sins, but for the sins of others. Immanuel, God with us, also means salvation for us.

Now since Jesus is God, then that means:

B. Jesus Is Able to Help Us – He is able to meet our needs. Jesus said in Mt. 19:26, “...with God all things are possible.” Thus, if He is God with us, Jesus could do the impossible.

Therefore, look to Jesus when you have a problem. The Son of God is greater than any problem you face. Look to Jesus when you have a need. He can help you.

C. God Cares for Us – Surely God would not live among us if He did not care for us. Through Christ He identified Himself with us. Surely, He is not only God with us but also God *for* us.

Peter gives an application for this wonderful truth in 1 Peter 5:7, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” Since God cares us, we should pray to Him.

D. God Knows Us by Personal Experience – God is omniscient. He knows everything. But when God became a man, He knew by personal experience all the struggles of childhood, youth, and adulthood. Are you struggling to earn a living? So did He, as He worked in the carpenter’s shop. Are you alone during this pandemic? So was He at times. Have you experienced poverty? So did He (2 Cor. 8:9). Have you experienced bereavement? So did He. Evidently Joseph died before Jesus did. He wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus and wept. Have you experienced rejection? So did He. The prophet even predicted that the Messiah would be “despised and rejected by men” (Isa. 53:3). Jesus was slandered and betrayed. He knows and understands our troubles and trials. As the book of Hebrews says, He was made in all points like us. He knew what it meant to hunger, to thirst, to face trials, and so forth. He even knew what it was to be tempted. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” God can thus assure us more fully that He understands us in every stage and circumstance of life.

So when you have a problem, it is wonderful to be able to talk with the divine One who has already experienced it and come through trials successfully. He can sympathize with your problems. Truly, He was with us in a way that we should appreciate and respond to. Take your problems to Jesus in prayer. He truly understands.

E. God Is Still With Us – Though Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He is still with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in John 16:7, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” The word “Helper” means, “One called along side.” Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit, is God with us. The good news of Christmas is that if you know Jesus, you are never really alone. God is with you. God is not a cosmic cheerleader, simply cheering us on. But by His Spirit He indwells us, enabling us to live lives pleasing to Him. And when Jesus sent His disciples out into the world, to share the Gospel, He promised in Matthew 28:20, “...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” He continues to be Immanuel through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. God has been with us in the difficult year of 2020, and God will be with us in 2021 as well.

Finally, notice with me another name or title that was given to Jesus around the time of His birth:

III. KING OF THE JEWS

In chapter 2 we read that wise men came from the East. And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they said in v.2, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” Somehow, they knew that He was born to be a King. They probably knew the Messianic implications of that title. Knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures had spread into much of the near Eastern world. Of course, the Old Testament prophets predicted that the Messiah would indeed be a King. He was to sit upon the throne of David. For example, in v.6 Matthew quotes from Micah 5:2, “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.” The first prophecy may be Genesis 49:10, which says, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.” Isaiah 9:6-7 says, “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder.... Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” In the book of Revelation we see that Jesus is not only the King of the Jews, but also the King of kings, and Lord of lords (19:16). He will reign over the whole world some day.

I believe there is strong evidence that Jesus is indeed the King. Their gift of gold, mentioned in v.11, was reflective of their belief that Jesus is a King. Providentially, Pilate wrote “King of the Jews” above the cross of Jesus (27:37). Another evidence is His resurrection. He conquered death. It was shortly after His resurrection that He declared in Mt. 28:18, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

So what should this title mean for us? Since He is God’s anointed King:

A. We Should Worship Him – That’s exactly what the wise men understood the title to mean. They said in the last of v.2, “For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” Sure enough, in the last of v.11 Matthew goes on to say that they “fell down and worshiped Him.” The word translated “worship” (*proskuneo*) was used of eastern people bowing and kissing the hand of a ruler, or falling prostrate and kissing his feet. In Scripture, such homage is to be given only to God (Acts 14:11-15; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). Yet, how appropriate, for the

Christ-child was God come in human flesh, Immanuel! He is the Messiah, the King. By the way, though they saw Mary (v.11), they did not worship her, but only Jesus!

We today should worship Him, not only for Who He is, but also for what He has done. He died for us. If He has saved you, forgiven you, given you His Holy Spirit, and changed your life, you certainly should worship Him. Oh, let us worship Him this Christmas season, and throughout the year. I commend you for doing that today, even though this is a busy time of the year. May you be committed to the worship of Jesus this coming year.

B. We Should Obey Him – Since He is a King, we should obey Him.² That is surely expected of us.

This is what the wise men did. We read in v.12, “Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.” They obeyed God’s message given in the dream.

My question to you is, Is He Lord of your life? Are you living in obedience to King Jesus? Have you said to Jesus, “Lord, I will obey you, and follow you all the days of my life”? Are you obeying His greatest commands, to love God, and to love your neighbor? Have you obeyed Him in regard to baptism? Are you living a life that is consistent with Christian morality and the Great Commission? Obey Jesus, but He is indeed our King.

C. We Should Give Gifts to Him – That is what the wise men did, and it was customary to present gifts when one came into the presence of a king. In v.11 we read, “And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” That is a part of true worship. Giving gifts is also an expression of love. Notice that their gifts were valuable, expensive gifts. This is indicated by the word “treasures”³, and because you know how valuable gold is, and frankincense and myrrh were expensive spices as well.

What will your gift to Jesus be this Christmas season? I can think of no better gift than one to support the work of our international missionaries. Will your Lottie Moon gift be worthy of a King? Have you given your best and most valuable gift to Jesus? Furthermore, they not only gave material gifts to Jesus, but also their time. They spent weeks or months traveling to find and worship this newborn King. Do you give your time to the Lord? Too many will not even give an hour or two to go to church each week. Do you give your time to worship and serve the great King, our Lord Jesus Christ?

Conclusion: So we have considered today three of the names and titles of Jesus. He is the Savior God has sent. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is the God who is not only with us but also for us, to help us. Finally, even at the time of His birth He was revealed to be the Messianic King that God promised to send. Will you obey Him?

Is Jesus your Savior and Lord? If not, trust in Him today. Receive Him into your heart, and you will personally know Him as Immanuel, God with us.

² 2 Chron. 30:12 says, “Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the LORD.”

³ Plural of *thesaurus*, the place in which good and precious things are collected and laid up; a treasure box or receptacle.

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961 reprint), v.23 only; Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); Dr. John MacArthur, *God With Us: The Miracle of Christmas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 51-59; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); John Piper, a few notes from his sermon on Matthew 2:1–12 entitled, “We Have Come to Worship Him” (desiringgod.org, 12/21/1997); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. I (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Christmas Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976 reprint), 55ff, 79-90, 1:23 & 2:1-12 only; Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on these texts); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), pp.77-81, 85, 94,100. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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