

Meaningful Names of the Miracle Baby

Matthew 1:18-25

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This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means “God with us”).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25 NIV)

In the name of Jesus, Immanuel, “God with us,” dear fellow redeemed:

When we put together a nativity set, we locate Jesus, the baby in a manger and put him front and center. Naturally we put Mary by him on the right or left, and then we place the sheep, oxen, the shepherds... Are we forgetting someone? Oh yeah, Joseph—he's the man standing opposite Mary on the other side of Jesus.

It seems like Joseph is often the “forgotten man” of Christmas. While Mary was Jesus’ mother, Joseph wasn’t his biological father. But that doesn’t make him any less important. Jesus needed to have a legal father, and that was Joseph. To fulfill the Scriptures, Jesus’ lineage had to be traced to ancient King David of Israel; Joseph checked that box—note how the angel addressed him as “son [descendant] of David.” And we’re told that Joseph was “faithful to the law”; he was a sinner but also God-fearing, and would be a good father, not only providing for Mary and Jesus with his carpentry trade, but leading the family to follow the Lord.

The gospel of Matthew tells us the birth of Jesus from Joseph’s perspective. On this last Sunday before Christmas, let’s look at two **Meaningful Names of the Miracle Baby:** Immanuel and Jesus.

Mary and Joseph were “pledged to be married” to each other when she was found to be pregnant, having conceived by the Holy Spirit. It sounds like they were merely engaged, but in Jewish custom the pledge already made them legally husband and wife, while consummating the marriage took place weeks, even months later. So when Mary was found to be pregnant, Joseph was in a bit of a dilemma. Naturally, he assumed Mary was unfaithful, because the child wasn’t his. Joseph had the right to publicly disgrace her and brand her as an adulteress. Mary could have been punished—according to Old Testament law, even by death. But Joseph, still caring for Mary, figured that he would just divorce her quietly, something permitted in Jewish law, rather than let her be exposed to public disgrace.

That’s when an angel informed Joseph in a dream what was really happening. “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Can you imagine how astonished Joseph must have felt? But then he remembered, perhaps he was reminded by the angel, how this fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy

in Isaiah 7:14: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel.” What a miracle! The child inside Mary’s womb was placed in her not by human relations, but by God the Holy Spirit. And just as miraculous, he is to be called Immanuel, a Hebrew name that means “With us God” or in better English, “God with us.”

After the dream Joseph took Mary home as his wife, but didn’t consummate the marriage until the child was born. Why not? His actions would show beyond a doubt that the child in Mary’s womb did not come from Joseph but from the Holy Spirit. The virgin did conceive and gave birth to a son. Immanuel—God with us—is born!

But why is that so important for us today? You and I are conceived and born in sin. We have to say with King David, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). We need a Savior to be human like us, but one without that sinfulness at conception and birth. Welcome Immanuel! The child was not conceived in sin, but by the Holy Spirit. He didn’t inherit the sinful nature you and I have. The name Immanuel, then, perfectly describes our Savior. He is “El,” true God, the one begotten of the Father from all eternity. And he is “Immanu,” with us, a true human being to dwell among us, as John’s gospel noted: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14a). God is not just “up there”, he is now “down here.” God is not somewhere “far away,” he is “among us, with us.” The Savior is truly God and truly man in one person!

The angel told Joseph that he was to give another meaningful name to the boy born of Mary. “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” This was to be given by custom at the boy’s circumcision, when he was 8 days old. The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew “Jah-shua”, “The LORD is salvation” or “the LORD saves.” Jesus and Joshua are really the same names. And how appropriate the name Jesus is! This is why the Son of God came into the world, to “save his people”, to save all of us, from the sins we’ve done.

This child is Jesus, a Savior for you and me too. We could not come to God because of our sinfulness. That is why God came to us. The angel declared it that night: “A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:11). Yes, Jesus is “Jah,” the Lord God himself and he is “shua,” our salvation, for by Jesus’ humility, by his suffering and death, we are now rescued from our sins. Because Jesus is our Savior, we will not endure eternal death and hell; we can look forward to eternal life and heaven!

When the time came for the 8-day-old boy to be circumcised, Joseph did just what the angel said. “And he gave him the name Jesus.” Joseph believed that this miracle boy was the Lord, and was his Savior. Joseph acted out of faith, believing the Word the angel said to him. What an example he is for us all! When you hear the message again, this Christmas as well as throughout the year, believe the good news that Jesus is your Savior, and respond to that Word with trusting obedience.

Mary, the angels, and even the shepherds spoke on the pages of Scripture. We don’t have any of Joseph’s words recorded in the Bible. But that’s OK. His actions spoke louder than words. Let’s be like Joseph, believe and live our faith in the miracle baby with those most meaningful names. Rejoice, rejoice! Here comes Immanuel! Here comes Jesus! Amen.