

NAME HIM JESUS - Luke 1 v26-38 and Matthew 1v18-25

Luke 1: v26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. ²⁷He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!" ²⁹Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. ³¹You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and **you will name him Jesus**. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, ³³and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!" ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?" ³⁵The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. ³⁷For there is nothing that God cannot do." ³⁸"I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

Matthew 1

¹⁸This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. ²⁰While he was *thinking** about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. ²¹She will have a son, and **you will name him Jesus** —because he will save his people from their sins." ²²Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, ²³"A young woman will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel" (which means, "God is with us"). ²⁴So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to. ²⁵But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

A better translation of the Greek implies anger was involved. Joseph was fuming about this?

NAME HIM JESUS

Naming a baby

Have you ever named a baby? It can be good fun, but also hard to agree on a name with a partner, and almost impossible if you consult relatives as well ! When we had our youngest son, we chose a name from the shortlist, sent out the cards announcing his arrival with his weight and name on, but had not registered the baby. We always left that to the last moment. Then on the last day we changed our minds completely and called him Simeon. It suited him well, and it was unusual enough that he would not get confused with anyone else. Then years later, his sister married a Simeon. So I now have a son and a son-in-law both called Simeon, which is very confusing !

Today we are going to look at a young lady, who had a baby boy, but was not allowed to choose his name.

Mary's visitor

Her name was Mary, and best estimate says she was just 13 years old. She was probably going about her daily duties, when she had this very unexpected visitor, Gabriel, an angel from God. He, did not look like the angels that children dress up as at Christmas, but looked like a large man, though I suspect he was shining brightly as he had been with God in his glory. God may have said to Gabriel, please try not to scare the girl. But his sudden presence was frightening. He tries to reassure Mary, and says Peace be with you, telling her she has found favour with God. He's fond of you Mary. But she is shaking with fear, as Gabriel tells her the result of this favour. She is going to be made pregnant with God's baby. How come – she asks. Gabriel tells her that God's Spirit will overshadow her and plant the seed in her womb. She will become a Mum without having sex, and there will be no way to prove this. She couldn't exactly record the conversation on a mobile phone.

She does not have to do anything. There is just one single instruction for her. **You will name him Jesus.** Don't worry Mary about being the main talking point of Nazareth gossip and a total disgrace upon your family. The only thing you have to worry about is getting the baby's name right !!

To prove to Mary, that he's not just making stuff up, he tells her about how her elderly cousin Elizabeth who through all her life has carried the stigma of not being able to have children. God has made her able to have a child when she is very old, and she is now 6 months pregnant. If he can do that to Elizabeth, then he can make you pregnant Mary. There is nothing that God can not do.

Mary understands what the angel is saying, and boldly stands up to him and says. I am Gods servant. Bring it on !

The Marriage dilemma

One slight problem though, Mary is already betrothed. She is engaged to Joseph, who would at least have been 18-20 if not older. Betrothal was like an engagement but more binding. Their fathers most likely arranged the marriage with the couples consent, and Joseph would have already paid some of the dowry, the price for the bride. The ceremony was done in the presence of witnesses, and was binding, so any infidelity would have been seen as adultery. It was not something Mary could just walk away from if she wanted to.

Pre-marital privacy between betrothed couples was accepted in Jerusalem and Judea, but was frowned upon in the Northern region of Galilee where they lived. So as well as the couple not having had sex, they may well have not even spent any time at all alone together, and there may well have been a year between betrothal and marriage.

When a woman married she left her family and moved in with the man which symbolised the end of the marriage process, and at which point her shame or honour is taken into the husbands character. If Mary gets pregnant before she is married, then how will Joseph react, because he will know it is not his child. If Joseph marries Mary when she is carrying some-one else's child, he will take on board to his own character the high level of shame Marys predicament would bring, and the knowledge that his oldest child was not his own. It would be a very high price for any young Jewish male to pay.

However for a woman with a child who had been publically divorced and shamed for adultery, it would be very difficult for Mary to find another husband, which would mean that once her parents died she would have no way of supporting herself. If Joseph loves Marys then he finds himself in a very difficult position.

Justice

Whereas Luke concentrates on Marys story, and may believe Luke interviewed an elderly Mary when compiling his books. Matthew however who was predominantly writing for a Jewish audience, concentrates on Joseph. So we start reading our key passage in Matthew's first chapter at verse 18.

¹⁸ This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately

Other translations say Joseph was 'Just'. He always did what was right, seeking and applying justice. But what type of Justice:-

There is retributive justice where you have harmed me, so I must now harm you.

There is justice where the law is applied equally. I pay my taxes and debts and so must you.

There is justice by the letter of the law. You were caught speeding (rushing your ill child to casualty) so must pay £100 fine and have 3 penalty points on your license. You were made pregnant by some-one

else, and the law says if a betrothed virgin had intercourse with another man and does not cry out for help at the time then she should be stoned.

If Joseph is just then will he be looking to divorce and shame Mary in a way that it would be impossible for her to marry again, or he could even have her stoned, as was the Old Testament tradition.

Yet the scriptures mention another type of Justice. In Isaiah's servant song passages (which are seen as prophetic passage about Jesus) and it includes these words..

A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench, he will faithfully bring forth justice. (Isaiah 42v3)

Reeds were used for pens, but what good was a bruised reed or crushed reed other than to break it and use it for heating or cooking. A dim flickering wick is given off no quality light, so it could be snubbed out or quenched to save the oil.

This form of justice requires looking past retribution, equality and the letter of the law, and instead making decisions which are made out of compassion, love and concern for those that are poor, weak, or outcast. The ball is in his court, Joseph has the decision regarding Mary's fate. But with the latter definition of justice in his heart, he reaches out with tenderness to the vulnerable young lady, and he makes plans to break off the betrothal quietly. He could break the divorce in private with just two trustworthy friends as witnesses.

King Herod the Great would be a threat to the life of Jesus when he was born, but this could have been the first threat on Jesus' life, whilst still a foetus. By acting out of prophetic justice for the vulnerable, and making plans to break off the engagement quietly, Joseph possibly saves the life of the unborn baby, and the baby's Mother. At the very least he saves Mary from a life of shame and rejection.

Joseph fumes

Joseph set out to protect the vulnerable Mary, but that doesn't mean he was happy about his new circumstances. Far from it.

Matthew 1v20 is translated - **While he was *thinking** about this ...**".

The word which describes what Joseph was doing is the greek word *enthymeomai* (ἐνθυμέομαι pronounced en-thoo-may-o-my). The word has two possible translations, the first is to think or ponder, and the second meaning is to become angry or very upset. For me the second translation fits better, what would any man do on hearing his fiancée is pregnant, and not by him? Would he sit quietly and calmly ponder the meaning of this, or would he get angry and upset. Some church traditions have venerated Joseph to the position where he could not possibly have become angry, especially not with the virgin Mary! His understanding of justice **did** lead him to do the right thing, but Joseph would have still been naturally very upset, feeling betrayed and be fuming about this pregnancy. But that was about to change ! Joseph had a dream.

Josephs dream

I don't remember any dreams, and recall so few that I claim I don't have dreams. Some people I know are always having the most exciting and complicated dreams, it must be exhausting for them to be asleep. We find out from Matthew that Joseph is a dreamer, just like his name-sake who had the coat of many colours. Presumably Joseph goes to bed still fuming about Mary's predicament, and then whilst in bed he has a dream in which an angel of the Lord appears to him.

²⁰ While he was *thinking about this , an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived." (Matt 1v20)**

This happens twice more to Joseph the dreamer in the nativity story..

An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, “Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave.” (Matt 2v13)

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead.” (Matt 2 v10-20)

Gabriel had come in person to see Mary. It seems fitting that the message to Mary be delivered in person by Gabriel, because of its importance, she would not be expected to take on such a life-changing decision off the back of a dream. Joseph though gets his instructions in a dream. It was a popular belief back then that the three signs of God favour of your life were a Good King, a fruitful year, and a good **dream**. So the fact that these announcements came in dreams made Joseph very willing and eager to obey them. This first dream was enough to confirm to him, what Mary had said about Gabriel and the virgin pregnancy must have been true, and he gets his own instructions from God.

We know that Joseph and Mary were very poor. First that was generally true of those that lived in Nazareth, but also because when they present a young Jesus at the temple, they can not even afford a lamb between them, so buy the minimum offering of two doves (Luke 2v23).

Yet the angel reminds the young man of his high birth status, you are Joseph descendant of King David, the line in which the promised Messiah will come from. He is told that the baby within her was not the result of any natural conception but the work of Gods Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who produced the world is now producing the saviour of the world. Then the Angel gives Joseph the same instruction that Gabriel had given Mary

²¹ She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins.”

Many couples nowadays do not want to know in advance if they are having a boy or a girl. They want to be surprised on the day. I like to know, especially with the second or third, whether the baby could make do with seconds or if you needed to go about some more clothes and gear. Joseph and Mary did not have the choice. The angels made sure of that. Mary will have a son, and you will name him Jesus, and here is why, this baby of yours will go on to save his people from their sins – you know, like God does, and this will fulfil what Isaiah the prophet proclaimed ! (Is 7v14).

Joseph encouraged by the dream marries Mary, but avoids sex until after the baby is born.. So Joseph is introduced by Matthews gospel, as a man of remarkable spiritual strategy with the strength and resolve of character to stand up to an entire community, and against the strong cultural norms of the day, and still take Mary as his wife.

Joseph also did what seemed so desperately important to Heaven, and that was to name the baby Jesus.

The importance of names

Genealogy and family identity was extremely important to first century Jews far more than it is to us today. There were some great names in Josephs ancestral line, that would have made wonderful names for the baby. He was a descendant of the great King David, and could have boldly been named after him to strengthen the link. Then there was a Zadok (named after a legendary priest who aided King David). There was a Jacob (named after the grandson of Abraham) or he could have passed down his own name Joseph after Jacobs favourite and most famous son. Mary though might prefer a name from her own family such as such as Eli or Zechariah, or perhaps gone for the most popular name at that time which Simeon, or other popular names like Lazarus and Cleopas

The angels gave them no choice, they were absolutely categorical about this issue – Name Him Jesus.

So here comes the big question....

Why the name of Jesus ?

In the Old Testament the name of God that could scarcely be spoken as it was so sacred was Yahweh – I am who I am. The only Old Testament Hebrew name which contained the word for God, was Yehoshua which we translate into English as Joshua. It means Yahweh is Salvation, or God is your Help. The name Yeshua, which we translate as Jesus, was simply a more modern shortened version of Yehoshua, and was the 6th most popular boys name when he was born. Which is why to distinguish him he was known as Jesus of Nazareth, or later as Jesus the Christ, which means Messiah. This became so popular that we often regard it now as his surname! After a couple hundred years the name Jesus became so associated with our Jesus of Nazareth, that it almost disappeared as a name for new-borns, much like in a negative way the once popular German boys name Adolf became so associated with Hitler that it was very rarely used again. This year in the UK the most popular boys name was Oliver, but the 6th most popular was Noah !! Jacob was 5th.

The name Yeshua (Yahweh is Salvation) was so important, because it links Jesus to his Father God, and proclaims him as the Saviour. No other name available at the time could do that. This is God bending towards humanity, becoming one of us, humbling himself, reaching out in mercy, dying for us, saving us and showing us the way home.

Name him Jesus – no other name is good enough.

Other Names

Have you got middle names, or even nick-names. Jesus is called a number of names in the biblical account of his birth, each revealing something more of his nature.

One of our favourite things to do at Christmas is sing Christmas Carols. I looked at the words of more than 20 of the most popular Carols that we sing every year, and only a third of them mention Jesus by name, such as the 'little Lord Jesus' in Away in a Manger. Of the others some are quite vague such as in We Three Kings which just refer to a 'Babe born on Bethlehem Plain'. The other Carols did not mention Jesus by name, but by other names that we have for Jesus in the Nativity story. such as Christ the Newborn King (in Angels from the Realms of Glory) and of course, O Come O Come Emmanuel

In the two nativity accounts of Matthew and Luke, we see a number of other names for Jesus. He is referred to as Immanuel, King of the Jews, Messiah, Son of the Most High God, Saviour Christ the Lord, and as a Light. John amplifies the latter by calling him 'a Light to the World'.

i) Christ (Christos) or Messiah – Shepherds outside Bethlehem are shaking with fear as an angelic choir fills the sky then one announces to them “ **This very day in David's town your Saviour was born —Christ the Lord! (Luke 2v11)** Christ and Messiah mean the same thing, the 'anointed one' - 'The special one. Football manager Jose Morinho is called the special one, and he joined Manchester United in 2016. He came to save Man U from trophy-less Seasons. But Jesus is the real special one, he came to save not just Man U but mankind ! He was set apart for a special mission from God, Israel's Messiah, to rescue them from their sins, and call the people back to God through the power of his love. From Day 1 the baby Jesus was anointed and appointed to be a saviour not just for the Jews, but the rest of the world.

ii) Son of God Gabriel tells Mary about her promised baby, that “**he will be great and will be called Son of the Most High God**” (Luke 1v32). But Jesus is God's son not in the way that we understand in our culture, where we would presume God pre-existed Jesus. But Jesus is his Son in the sense that he **shares his nature and represents his intentions** on Earth. He is fully divine and is not only fully able to

represent God the Father, he is the only one that can truly represent him. Jesus favourite name for himself was Son of Man. Like the Father, Jesus always was, always is and always will be God, but unlike the Father Jesus is also human. Together Son of God and Son of Man wonderfully represent the incarnation, God becoming man in the birth of Jesus,. They represent the greatness that he came from and the lowliness that he sank to for our sakes.

iii) **Immanuel** – Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy , **“the young woman will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”**. Literally translated, this means ‘with us is God’. So as you welcome in Jesus, you know that the presence of God is with you. It’s one of his names! From the very beginning, God has had a persistent desire to dwell with his people. He wants to be a part of our lives, to enjoy us and for us to enjoy Him. In and through Jesus, God would succeed in saving the world not by externally winning battles for us, but by transforming us from the inside. He is with us, he comes into our lives to rescue us, pay for our wrongdoings, and restore our relationship with him. You can never truly be alone when you know Jesus, for he is always with you.

iv) **Light of the World** (p28),

Jesus spends 9 months in the dark, in his mothers’ womb to then bring us his light, and show us how to live. John describes Jesus as the true light that shines on every man. He shines as a light in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. (John 1). This light destroys the darkness caused by our sins, and by the devil, the prince of darkness. Jesus later said “I am the light of the world, and whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8v12) described us his followers in the same way as we are to reflect his light through our good deeds. There is no life without light. Just as natural light is essential to life on earth in the now, Christ light is essential to unending eternal life with God.

Power in the Name

The miracle in Mary is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Incredibly part of God will come and fertilise an egg and grow the Son of God inside her. The same miracle working Holy Spirit is here today and can rest on us today. If the Holy Spirit can do that do Mary, then the word impossible is not in Gods vocabulary, and he is able to do anything in your life too. There is no dream, hope, or request to God which to him, if he wills it, is impossible. If it can not be done in the natural, then it can be done in the supernatural.

And one of the keys to seeing the Holy Spirit move in power, as he did on Mary is by using the name of Jesus.

As Peter and John go into the temple for prayers, a beggar lame from birth calls out to them, and Peters reply is famous **“Silver and gold have I none, but in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”** . [Acts 3v6] The man go up and started jumping around and praising God.

Jesus holds the ultimate authority, and ultimate power over all things. Not every battle is won right now down here, but he has the ultimate victory over all things. Paul wrote to the Phillipians **“– At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow “** (Philippians 2v10). This is his ultimate authority and power. Over everyone, over everything. Nobody you know, no situation you know, no matter how desperate is above the name of Jesus. Not every prayer **is** answered, but every prayer **can** be answered if it Gods wills it.

If we call 999 then we **expect** to get the Fire Brigade to come out if we have a fire, we **expect** the police to come out if we have been robbed, and we **expect** an ambulance to be sent if some-one is seriously ill. So if we listen to God as to what to pray, and then we pray in the name of Jesus, we can **expect** him to do things through us that we could not do without him. We should **expect** to see the power of God when we pray in the name of Jesus.

People can be delivered from every walk of life through the name of Jesus. All chains on peoples life can be broken in the name of Jesus. He can heal broken bodies but he can create from nothing. If you asked

me what is the biggest thing you have learnt from God this year, I would say, that I have learnt from first hand experience, the power there is in the name of Jesus. Power to do miracles through ordinary people like me and you.

Conclusion

Joseph had come to a crisis point in his life where he had the toughest of decisions to make. In that moment he chose to listen to Gods voice, even though it went against the strong cultural expectations. The religious letter of the law, would have had him divorce or even stone Mary in order for him to act righteously. But he founder a deeper guide to what was right, from the prophetic heart of God, a justice for the vulnerable. As he listened to Gods voice and followed it, then God was with him, and helped him fulfil his own special mission of being a parent to Jesus.

What is your circumstance today? Are you at a crisis point or decision point? Who will you name as number one in your life. Who will you listen to, whose desires and purposes will you base your decisions on. Who will you look to for justice, for security, for peace, for forgiveness and assurance. Will it be the name above all names?

Name him Jesus – Yeshua, in your life. Because God is your helper. He is the Christ, the special one, on a mission to help and save you. He is fully God, but fully man too, He is Emmanuel, who is always with you. (He'll never leave you). He is the Light of the world, bringing you new life now and eternal life later, if you trust in him. It is a wonderful name. It is a powerful name. You can expect great things when you pray in the name of Jesus.

Make him number one in your life today. Name him Jesus. Amen.

Credit: Praying the names of Jesus (Anne Spangler)