

The Christmas Names of Christ
Christmas Message - December 23, 2007
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church

For those of you who are parents, can you recall the time you spent looking through name books, or thinking about the names of people you love and respect, while trying to come up with just the right name for when your child was born? That was a precious and exciting time, of course you remember it!

On this Sunday before Christmas, our thoughts turn to Joseph and Mary, and the child they were to name. They however, never went through the process we just spoke of, because they did not actually choose the name of their child. Instead, His name was given to them to use. In fact, He was given more than just one name. There are many more names given to Christ at His birth than we can address in just one message, but there are three occasions in the Gospels, in association with the Christmas Story, where we are specifically told the child of Joseph and Mary was to be called by certain names.

It is these three names I want us to consider this morning, for in them we gain the best understanding of what Christmas is all about. We will consider them in a specific order because of the significance of the names.

I. The Son of the Highest

The first name is provided in Luke 1:32, *He shall be called the Son of the Highest*. Look with me at Luke 1:32...

The context of this name is the announcement by the angel Gabriel to Mary that she would be with child. Two aspects of this announcement seemed overwhelming in themselves. First, there was the very vivid appearance of the angel. Although angelic appearances are somewhat common in the Scriptures they were not as common as to be expected in an individual's life. Second, there was the message she would give birth to a child. We are told in verse 29 she was *troubled* at the saying, and in verse 34 she was *confused* by it because she was a virgin and had not been with a man. But, I would think, the most overwhelming aspect of this whole scene is found in verse

32; the angel said this child would be called, *the Son of the Highest*. This was a unique way of calling Him the Son of God, as is done in verse 35.

As Christians, we believe we are sons and daughters of God, just as it says in John 1:12, *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*” but the implication in Luke 1 of the child Mary would give birth to is entirely different. He would not be just any child of God, but *the Son of the Highest*. Or, as it tells us in John 1:18 and John 3:16, *the only begotten Son of God*.

Mary, as a good young Jewish girl, understood entirely the implication of that name. Much later, this child as He grew would use this name of Himself, and whenever He did His listeners understood Him to be making Himself out to be God. In fact, after His arrest, the high priest and the Sanhedrin Council handed Him over to Pilot, the Roman governor, for crucifixion because He claimed to be God.

The child born to Mary on that first Christmas morning was unlike any other child ever born in this world. He was *the Son* of God. He was of the same nature and essence as God. The angel told Mary this would be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. He would overshadow Mary and bring about the miracle of her pregnancy.

In most public places today depictions of this child have been removed. Why, because He is not, nor ever was, just any child, but instead, *the Son of the Highest*; God if you will. The idea of a small child in a manger doesn't offend anyone, but to say that child was God Himself is different; it does offend. Because then we have to answer to Him and many are not prepared to do that. The name given to the child of Mary, *the Son of the Highest* implies we must recognize and worship Him as God of very God.

As I said, to me this must have been the most overwhelming aspect of the angel's announcement to Mary. The thought of God, high and lifted up as Isaiah saw Him, being conceived as a child in Mary really does go beyond human comprehension. But to believe it changes everything about our view of Christmas. Christmas isn't about most of the things that so occupy our minds at this time of year. Christmas is about God Himself, *the Son of the Highest*.

II. Immanuel

This child received other names as well. One of the most comforting for us is found in Matthew 1:23, *He shall be called Immanuel*. Let's look at Matthew 1:23...

This name is also given within the context of an angel's message, but this time to Joseph. Joseph had been very troubled. Mary had been away for awhile to visit her cousin Elizabeth, and upon her return, she gave news of her pregnancy to Joseph. You can imagine how difficult those words must have been because even though she had been betrothed to him their marriage had not yet been consummated. Joseph didn't know what to think and he didn't know what to do. While he struggled with this news, he fell into a deep sleep. While sleeping an angel of the Lord appeared to him to answer the questions of his heart. What he discovered was that Mary had been faithful and that the child was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 23 stands out because it is a reference to Isaiah 7:14, a promise made 700 years earlier. To the people of Isaiah, living in a troubled time, it was a promise meant to comfort them at that moment, but its fulfillment was something they were to look forward to in the future. The angel was telling Joseph the time of its fulfillment had come. The child his wife Mary would give birth to was the promised One. He would be called *Immanuel*, which means God with us. In fact, the whole book of Matthew seeks to establish this truth by repeated references to the Old Testament and by pointing out this child alone met all the prophetic requirements.

The name *Immanuel* tells us just who this child was, God with us. But just what did that mean? That the child was a symbol of God pulling for us? Not at all! The Bible is much more to the point than that. In Philippians 2, the Apostle Paul said of Him that He being God took the form of a servant and came in the likeness of man. In John 1, the Apostle John said in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

The child was called *Immanuel* because He was God in flesh. He was not a symbol, but exactly what the angel said, God with us in person! He took on the flesh of man that He could know our sorrows, know our temptations, know our hardships, and be able to help. Hebrews 4 tells us He can sympathize with all our weaknesses because He was tempted in all points as

we are, yet without sin. The name given to the child of Mary and Joseph means God does understand because He identified Himself with us.

In Romans 8:31, the Apostle Paul says, “*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*” Then in verses 38-39 he adds, “*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Christmas time is known to be one of the loneliest and most depressing times of the year for many people, but if we really believe in the name *Immanuel*, it changes everything about our view of Christmas. No matter what is going on in our lives, the reasons for discouragement and loneliness fade away because God Himself **is** with us.

III. Jesus

It is the third name given to this child that seems to have become the most precious, *He shall be called Jesus*. Let’s look at a few references. Matthew 1:21-25; Luke 1:31 and 2:21...

Did you know there are more than 700 names and titles of the Lord Jesus Christ in Scripture? Out of them all Jesus is the best known. When we read through the New Testament, this name is unavoidable because it is, by far, the most often used. What has made it so popular and precious?

The angel’s message to Joseph in Matthew 1 tells us it is a name of purpose. The Son of the Highest and Immanuel are names that identify Him, Jesus is a name that tells us what He came to do. Matthew 1:21, “*You shall call his name Jesus, **for** he will save his people from their sins.*” He didn’t come just to identify with us, understand us, sympathize with us, and say, “*Hey guys, I’m pulling for you!*” He came to do something to save us from our sins. In Luke 2, the angels said to the shepherds He was born a Savior.

As we study His life in the Scriptures, from start to finish, that’s what He was about. In John 1, John the Baptist seeing Jesus coming said, “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” Hebrews 12:2 says, “*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set*

down at the right hand of the Father.” From start to finish, while in this world, Jesus went about the work of our salvation.

But just because Jesus was born, died, and rose again does not mean His salvation is automatically applied to us. It takes personal faith. Look with me at John 1:10-13...

Romans 10:9 adds the same thought, *“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

The name *Jesus* is such a precious name because it is the only name by which we can be saved from our sins. Acts 4:12, *“Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

The name given to the child of Mary and Joseph, *Jesus*, means God wants to make our lives different. He wants to free us from the bondage of sin. When we really believe that, not only does it change everything about our view of Christmas, it also changes our view of everything because no longer do we see through the darkness of sin, but through the love of our Savior, *Jesus*.

The Christmas names of Christ tell us who He is, God; where He is, with us; and what He came for, to save us. All that remains is for us to recognize and receive Him. I appreciate your presence here on this Sunday before Christmas; it demonstrates your desire to do just that.