

A Name to Remember [Matthew 1:21]

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... *you are to give him the name Jesus* ...

By the time the baby is born, parents most often have chosen a name, or perhaps two or three. Occasionally a name may almost be imposed on them by the tradition of parents or grandparents. Something makes them accept and agree that this is the one it must be. So it was with Jesus. The name had come to Joseph in a dream. The Bible takes dreams seriously and so does modern day psychiatry. When you dream of an angel, you may be sure that you will pay attention. So these words were to be burned into Joseph's heart and mind: *you are to give him the name Jesus*.

One might expect the messenger from God to give an extraordinary name for this extraordinary baby. When the prophet Isaiah had a son he reported that the Lord had spoke to him and told him to name his child: *Maher-shal-al-hash-baz*. That's the kind of name that raises questions and must be quite a burden to carry throughout life even back when they didn't have all our sets of forms to fill out. And think of the problems that hymn writers would have had if Joseph had been given that name instead of, Jesus. Jesus was in fact a very common name with the Hebrews, although not exactly as we have it now. Jesus is the Latin spelling off the Greek, *YESOUS*, which was in turn is a modification of the Hebrew name, Joshua. Since you didn't come here today for a lecture in etymology, let me try and keep it simple and say that the name given to this little boy was, Joshua, and when he went to school there would have been several other Joshuas around. After all, one of the great heroes of the Hebrews was called Joshua as is the book in the Old Testament with his name.

I think God wanted Him to have a very common name. He was to be truly one of us, sharing all the joys and sorrows we know, subject to the same dangers, feeling the heat and the cold, being hungry and thirsty, laughing and weeping. So the baby got the familiar name, Joshua, just as the baby Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, who was born about six months before, got the name, John, which today is even more common than Joshua. And to show the translation, in French it is, Jean, and in Gaelic it is, Ian or Iian.

It isn't the name you are given determines the person you are going to be. Even people who are saddled with absurd or meaningless names can have them let them down and make them lovely for those who knows. I heard about a baptism in

Scotland with a little child received the name, *Pinonah*, because that is what the father responded when with when asked, *what is the Christian name of this child?* Shortly after he complained bitterly to the minister. *You told me you might not remember the name, so I wrote it out and pinned it on her. And that's what I said when you asked me: it's pinned on her! What her name you have given her! What is in a name? I trust little Pinonah will grow to be a lovely Christian woman.*

Yet, there was something in the name given to Mary's child and our text tells us what it was. The name Joshua in Hebrew means, *the Lord shall save*. So, from the moment of his birth, son of Mary was called, Saviour or Deliverer. Thus we read: *You are to give him the name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins*. And from that day until now the name Jesus has been lifted higher above all other names on earth. It is the Saviour we celebrate today.

I have noticed throughout the Advent season, journalists seem to be searching for some signs of light to report among the gloomy news that reflects what is happening in our modern world, even in our part of Ontario. There are of course some. A writer in **TIME** pointed out in an article, there are many terrible things that haven't happened. But I would suggest that the brightest sign of all is the persistence of the name, Jesus, across the centuries and around the globe and the saving power it proclaims. The name given to a little Jewish boy in the stable at Bethlehem some 2000+ years ago has become a name to remember. It is probably that more men, women and children know that name today than ever before. However, in his pronounced, Jesus, Hesous, Yesous, Jesu, it is an instant bond between those who love Him. And in the secular world, the name of Jesus cannot be forgotten. Even when it is used as an expletive, His beloved name is used unwittingly as a tribute being paid to the unforgettable Christ.

A good part of our attempt to live the Christian life could be described as remembering the name, Jesus. In a time of joy like Christmas Day, we remember him and the joy has a deeper meaning. In a time of goodwill and depression of spirit, we remember Him and he shares the burden and leads us through. In a time of strong temptation, we remember him and like St. Paul, we hear a voice that says, *you have not so learned Christ (Ephesians 4:20)*. In a time of guilt, we remember him and may hear the voice that said, *neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more*.

***How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!***

*Its soothes his sorrow, heals his wounds,
and drives away his fear.*

Around the world there has been a revival of the prayer used by a Russian monk. It is called, **The Jesus Prayer**. It is simply the repetition of the words, *Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. It is a good way to begin or end a day or to seek strength at any moment wherever we happen to be.

She will give birth to a son and you will call his name, Jesus; for he will save his people from their sins. What better day than today, the Sunday before Christmas, to remember the name, Jesus. Our carols and readings don't simply take us back to the manger: they lift our hearts and minds toward the day when, *at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.*