

What's in a Name?

When Raye Jeanne was pregnant with the girls, we spent many hours reading names back and forth to one another, trying to come up with something that we thought sounded right and would be fitting for our unknown child.

At the same time, there were people who were wanting to know what we were going to call the children, and we just didn't want to get into the debates — “Oh, you can't call her that, I once knew a _____ and she was just horrible...” So how do you handle that? I'm not sure that this was a sanctified response, but we gave the girls interim names. Whenever we referred to her, Elizabeth was “Cosmo” (though if she was a girl, we said we would name her “Cosmena”). And boy or girl, Emily, we said, was Balfour Trafalgor. In particular, Raye Jeanne's father was quite worried about the whole prospect of Cosmo. (I guess we said what we did with a fairly straight face.)

Of course we couldn't actually name our girls that way, because names are important. A name conjures up images of what a person is like. A name often reveals family history and family priorities and purposes. That is even more true about names in the Bible. And nowhere was that more true than with the names and titles of Jesus at His advent.

Biblically, identity is revealed in a name. So when God names something, He is revealing its nature and character. So when He reveals Himself, He is Yahweh, the eternally self-existent One, and He is Lord, the Master and Sovereign. And when He names Satan “the devil,” He is telling us that Satan is slanderous and a liar.

In a similar way, the names God used for His Son at His birth reveal both the identity of Christ and His purpose in coming. We read the stories of the birth of Christ and we skim over the identifiers about Christ, but the large number of names used to reveal Christ is significant — they reveal what God thinks about Him and also reveal His nature and His purpose. Consider some of the names and titles the Gospel accounts used when Jesus was born:

✓ Jesus	✓ Son of God	✓ Son of David
✓ The Most High	✓ Messiah	✓ Son of Abraham
✓ Son of the Most High	✓ Christ, the Lord	✓ Immanuel
✓ Child	✓ The Lord's Christ	✓ King of the Jews
✓ Holy Child	✓ Jesus Christ	

This morning, I want to examine some of these names with you as a reminder of the character of the One we worship.

1. CHILD: the Divine Who Took on Flesh (Mt. 2:13ff; Lk. 2:11-14)

- When you read Matthew and Luke's accounts of Christ's advent, it is striking how often Jesus is referred to only generically as "the child." The word "child" as a reference to Christ appears 17x in Mt. 1-2 and Luke 2 and at least 13x it appears to be a name or title.
- Matthew in particular uses this name — 1:20; 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21.
 - Notice the priority of word order in this passage: **the Child** is placed before **His mother** (cf. vv. 13-14, 20-21). When Mary is mentioned, she is always mentioned second. Jesus is the priority. While Mary was graciously protected, the plan to flee to Egypt was God's purposeful plan to protect the Messiah.
 - Notice also that **child** is often preceded by the article — **the**. It is a particular child who is in view — a child who is unlike any other child. A child who is more than a child.
 - This is further affirmed by the declaration of the angel and the host (Lk. 2:11-14). What makes this child unique, of course, is not merely the arrival of a baby, but the kind of baby who arrived; He was a baby who uniquely possessed both full deity and full manhood.
 - What makes Christ unique is that He alone possessed manhood and deity.
 - What makes Christ unique is His humble obedience to the Father to lay aside all the rights of heaven and take on the mantle of humanity (**Phil. 2:7-8**).
 - Raye Jeanne and I had two children and I have seen and held many babies and I've heard even more conversations about them. I've heard babies called cute, sweet, adorable, cuddly, precious, and more. But only Christ has had a multitude of angels arrive after His birth to glorify God for His advent. There has never been any other child like this child.

2. JESUS: the One Who was Born to Die (Mt. 1:21)

- Jesus** = Joshua, "God saves." Jesus' primary name reflects His primary purpose — to save His people from the influence, power, and effect of sin (cf. Lk. 2:11, 30; 1 Jn. 3:5).
 - This name, Jesus, is a reminder of our need for salvation. We are powerless, hopeless, under the wrath of God, and condemned. We are dead men. Our sin has left us separated from God in the most desperate situation imaginable (Eph. 2:12).
 - This name, Jesus, is also a reminder of the grace of God who saves the undeserving (e.g., God's salvation of Israel through the covenant, Dt. 7:6-8).
 - That Jesus' name is Jesus, "God saves," is a reminder both of our need and His provision.

- There are few happy emotions like the birth of a child, but at Christmas, while we celebrate a baby in a manger, this baby is different. All parents are aware (at least intellectually) when their children are born that one day they will die. But babies are still born to live; this baby was born to die, though He himself was eternal and it was not intrinsically necessary in His humanity to die.
 - ✓ So C. S. Lewis said, “The Son of God became man to enable men to become the sons of God.” And the only way that would happen was through the death of Christ. So the important issue at Christmas is not so much that He came, but why he came.
 - ✓ John MacArthur has captured well the uniqueness of this purpose:

“The important issue of Christmas is not so much that Jesus came, but why He came....Here’s a side to the Christmas story that isn’t often told: those soft little hands, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb, were made so that nails might be driven through them. Those baby feet, pink and unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be nailed to a cross. That sweet infant’s head with sparkling eyes and eager mouth was formed so that someday men might force a crown of thorns onto it. That tender body, warm and soft, wrapped in swaddling clothes, would one day be ripped open by a spear. Jesus was born to die.” [MacArthur, God With Us.]

- God purposefully sent Christ to die (Acts 2:22-23). And because Christ was sent by God with this purpose of death, His death was neither untimely nor a tragedy.
 - ✓ He came to lead/pioneer our salvation (Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9)
 - ✓ He fixed problem of death/Satan (Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:55), fulfilling Gen. 3:15.
 - ✓ He remedied the problem of sin.
 - Heb. 10:11 (cf. Lev. 8:22ff [“blood”]) — no blood from animals can ever satisfy God (nor can men’s own blood ever satisfy God either (cf. Rev. 14:14-20).
 - Heb. 10:12 — the blood of Christ perfectly satisfies God so that the One who was sacrificed is forever seated at the right hand of the One He satisfied with His death.
 - ✓ Because He was born to die, we can be reborn to live.

“Jesus endured a human birth to give us a new spiritual birth. He occupied a stable that we might occupy a mansion. He had an earthly mother so that we might have a heavenly Father. He became a subject that we might be free. He left His glory to give us glory. He was poor that we might become rich. He was welcomed by shepherds at His birth whereas we at our birth are welcomed by angels. He was hunted by Herod that we might be delivered from the grasp of Satan. This is the great paradox of the Christmas story. It is that which makes it irresistibly attractive. It is the reversal of roles at God’s cost for our benefit.” [James Montgomery Boice, The Christ of Christmas.]

3. CHRIST: the Messiah of Israel (Mt. 1:1, 16; 2:4-6)

- Jesus came not only as Savior, but also, for the Jews, as Messiah. Interestingly, the name/title “Messiah” is used only two times in the NT, though the concept is clearly in minds of Israelites.
 - ✓ The word simply means, “the Anointed One.” The title “Christ” also means “anointed one,” and is used as a reference to the OT concept of the coming Messiah. This is the word used by Matthew.
 - ✓ In Israel, prophets, priests & kings were all anointed; and Christ as Messiah would fulfill all three roles. But when an Israelite thought about the Messiah, he was particularly thinking about the King who would come to sit eternally on the throne of David.
 - ✓ The Messiah was One who would come from God the Father, commissioned by Him to be Israel’s deliverer — the One who “would redeem Israel, rule as king over a restored kingdom, and answer all mankind’s questions about God’s plans and purposes.”
- Matthew’s gospel particularly portrays Jesus as the Messiah, from the beginning to the end of His life and ministry (Mt. 1:1, 16; 27:37)
- Matthew 2:4-6 demonstrates the kind of Messiah (ruler) Christ would be...
 - ✓ **Ruler** = sovereign, strong leader. Contrast w. 1 Sam. 8:7ff.
 - ✓ **Shepherd** = protector, cf. Ps. 23.
 - ✓ This does not mean He is a “softie” who will overlook sin. He will care for His people; but at the same time He will be absolutely *JUST*.
 - ✓ He will be final, perfect ruler of Israel — fulfilling all God’s promises (Dt. 18:15, 18)

4. KING: the Ruler of the World (Mt. 2:2; Lk. 1:32-33; 2:32)

- While Jesus was the Messianic King, He also came to be King of all earth (Rev. 15:3). His Kingdom is not limited to a small parcel of land in the Middle East. And, in fact, His kingdom is not limited to all the lands of the world. Abraham Kuyper was right when he said,

“When Jesus looks at his universe from his exalted throne at the right hand of the Father, and he sees the great galaxies whirling in space, the planets and the people upon this planet, and all the minute details of life here including the details of our individual lives, there is nothing that he sees anywhere of which he cannot say, ‘Mine!’”

- Everything everywhere is under the dominion of His authoritative kingship.
- What kind of King is He? He is a king unlike any other king, as He Himself has told us:
 - ✓ He is a king of *forgiveness* and *grace* (Mt. 18:23-35); God’s kingdom is righteousness w. grace.

- ✓ He is a king of *judgment* (Mt. 25:31-34, 41; Rev. 19:11-16); no deed ever escapes His notice and no deed will ever go unpunished or unrewarded. And everything He does is fully equitable, which is why Paul says what he does in Rom. 12:19-21.
 - His wrathful judgment is for unbelievers
 - His rewarding judgment is for believers.
- ✓ He is a king of *servanthood* (Mt. 27:11, 29, 37, 42; Mk. 10:45). He not only washes the feet of His disciples and provides bread for His children but in an act of servanthood never superseded, he died for His people. This seems antithetical to what a king does. A king is served; he does not serve. Others bow to the king; the king does not bow to others. Not so with King Jesus.

“True greatness, true leadership, is achieved not by reducing men to one’s service but in giving oneself in selfless service to them....The true spiritual leader is concerned infinitely more with the service he can render God and his fellowmen than with the benefits and pleasures he can extract from life. He aims to put more into life than he takes out of it.” [Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 20.]

- ✓ He is a king of *peace* (Lk. 2:14; 19:38; Jn. 14:27; Heb. 7:1f). He comes in peace and He restores eternal peace. But the only way to be at peace with Him is to know God’s pleasure (Lk. 2:14). We can only please God when we are completely righteous. Because our first sin prevents us from ever being righteous, our only hope is to have an alien and foreign righteousness attributed to us through Christ’s work on the cross (Rom. 3:20, 26).
- ✓ He is a king of complete *sovereignty* (1 Tim. 6:14-16; Rev. 19:16).
- ✓ He is an “*overcoming*” king (Rev. 17:14) — the *LAMB* overcomes the wars of nations! This king is never defeated never overwhelmed never vanquished never weary and never discouraged. He is opposed, but in His infinite power, no opposition can threaten His authority at any time.
- ✓ SUMMARY: 1 Tim. 1:17. He *is* King. And He *will* rule all the earth. And He rules with greater wisdom, authority, and grace than I have a mind to comprehend. That also means that He has an inherent right to rule my life *now*.

5. IMMANUEL: the One Who is With Us (Mt. 1:23)

- When God created man, He created man for fellowship — to be *with* man (Gen. 3:8).
- Sin entered and fellowship with God was destroyed (Gen. 3:8; 1 Jn. 1:6). The whole OT was a “temporary solution” to prob. of sin and broken fellowship.
- The advent of **Immanuel** is God’s permanent solution to broken fellowship. He comes to make “God with us” a permanent reality for those who believe in Christ.

- ✓ In the OT, God was present with the Israelites through His presence over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. But only one priest annually was allowed to enter that sanctuary and even then needed the shield of a cloud of incense to keep from seeing the fulness of God's glory; but now Christ is *with* us, and even *in* us (Rom. 8:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:16; Col. 1:27). To say "Immanuel" in the OT might have made the Israelite comforted with the thought of the presence of the Ark; to say "Immanuel" now means to be comforted by the fact that through His Spirit, Christ is with me by indwelling me and living His life through me.
- ✓ So God is not only in us, but He is *at work in us* (Phil. 1:6; 2:13; 1 Thess. 2:13).
- ✓ Divine fellowship has been restored through Christ (1 Jn. 1:3).
- What does it mean that Christ is Immanuel? The coming of Christ is the fulfillment and restoration for intimacy with man. We who are lonely for His fellowship now have Him intimately with us at all times.

"That God is equally near to all parts of His universe is plainly taught in the Scriptures (Ps. 139:1-18), yet some beings experience His nearness and others do not, depending upon their moral likeness to Him. It is dissimilarity that creates the sense of remoteness between creatures and between men and God.

"Two creatures may be so close physically that they touch, yet because of dissimilarity of nature be millions of miles apart. An angel and an ape might conceivably be in the same room, but the radical difference between their natures would make communion impossible; They would be 'far' from each other in fact.

"For all the moral unlikeness between man and God the Bible has a word, alienation, and the Holy Spirit presents a frightful picture of this alienation as it works itself out in human character. Fallen human nature is precisely opposite to the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Because there is no moral likeness there is no communion, hence the sense of physical distance, the feeling that God is far way in space. This erroneous notion discourages prayer and prevents many a sinner from believing unto life." [Best of A. W. Tozer, pp. 53-4.]

- But Christ — only Christ — has resolved that alienation as Immanuel.
- Because Christ has come as Immanuel we are close to God, restored to the kind of fellowship envisioned in the Garden with Adam and Eve.

CONCLUSION: “NAMES” (“Language Professor..., DMN article)

- Fred Tarpley was a professor at TAMU — Commerce and something of an expert in the origins of family and place names, having edited numerous books on the subject. In a newspaper article a number of years ago he noted that,

“Family names can shed light on any one of four things: Where the family lived (Lake, Meadow, Churchill); what they did for a living (Taylor, Baker, Cook); a description, such as hair color (Black, Brown, Reed from ‘red’); or their ancestry (John’s son, or Andrew’s son, which evolved into Johnson and Anderson).

“‘People were simply formalizing nicknames,’ Mr. Tarpley said. ‘This man is Robert...which Robert? Robert the tailor, or Robert who lives in the forest, or Robert the tall man, or Robert, who is John’s son.’”...

“‘You start recognizing roots, prefixes and suffixes,’ Mr. Tarpley said. His own names, which is English, comes from three words: ‘tor,’ meaning hill, ‘por,’ meaning pear tree, and ‘ley,’ meaning meadow. Together they have an almost lyrical meaning: Dweller on the hill by the pear tree in the meadow.”

- Names are important. Our names tell us...
 - ✓ where our families lived,
 - ✓ what they did,
 - ✓ from whom they descended,
 - ✓ or how they might be described.
- The names of Jesus Christ also tell us about Him. He came as a baby, yes, but far more importantly, He came as the infinite God-Man, He came to save His people, lead Israel, demonstrate His kingship over the earth, and be with His people.
- What’s in the name of Jesus? Everything we need to know to be saved and satisfied.