

“You Will Name Him Jesus”

Names are important to us.

When our children are born we are careful to pick just the right name. Sometimes we give a name that has been in the family for many years. Sometimes we might name our children after someone who is famous. If we are Christian we might give a Biblical name to our children.

We did all of the above in our family.

Our first child is named Bethany Jewel. Bethany is Biblical and it means “house of bread.” When she was born our house was full of God’s grace. God had abundantly blessed us. I was excited because I grew up in a house full of boys and now I had a little girl. Your first child always has a special place in your heart.

Jewel comes from Malia’s grandmother and she truly was a “jewel” of a woman. She was a faithful wife, mother, and a devout servant of God. We believe that the abundance of God’s grace will flourish in Bethany’s life and we expect her to bring honor to her great grandmother’s name.

Then there is Parker Dietrich. I’m not sure what Parker means, we just liked that one. I came up with Dietrich after a famous German Christian named Dietrich Bonhoffer.

Dietrich Bonhoffer had a cozy job as a seminary professor in New York City when Adolph Hitler came into power in Germany. Bonohoffer decided it would be inconsistent for him to criticize Hitler from America so he went back to Germany to be with his people and to band with a small group of underground Christians who were courageous enough to stand up against the furor.

Bonhoffer was thrown into a prison camp and was executed just two weeks before the war ended. His testimony and faithfulness to Christ is amazing. I believe that God will give Parker that same courage to be faithful to his Lord in a world that is increasingly becoming hostile to the faith he professes.

Next is Ingrid Anna. Malia picked that name because of its uniqueness and Ingrid is definitely unique from the rest of my children. It is Scandinavian and it means... Anna I liked because I had a grandmother named Anna. Anna is also biblical. She was a prophetess who was waiting in the temple when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be dedicated to God.

The Bible says that Anna never left the temple but she worshipped the Lord night and day as she waited for the Savior. Ingrid, just like Anna did, loves to come early to church with me on Sunday mornings. She’s also a pretty good talker so she might end up being a

prophetess herself. I believe that God will keep that love for Him in her heart and that she will always want to worship him and spread His gospel.

Finally there is Simon. You know that show “Everybody Loves Raymond”? You could make one called “Everybody Loves Simon.” Both of his names are Biblical. Simon means, “God hears” and “Asher” means “he laughs.” You put the two together and you have “God hears laughter.”

Simon’s name fits him to a tee because he is always laughing and making people laugh with his unique personality. He is the joy of our family. Everyone vies for his attention. I believe that God will continue to bless Simon with the joy of life and the Lord and that his life will continue to bless others with that same joy and laughter.

You Will Name Him Jesus

Today in our text we have a name given to a child that a young peasant girl named Mary would bring into the world. His name would be the greatest of all names. His name would be “Jesus” and it means “Yahweh is salvation.”

“Yahweh” is the Hebrew word for the personal name of God.

There were plenty of people who had been named “Jesus” in the past, going all the way back to Joshua in the OT. In Hebrew “Joshua” is the same as the Greek name “Jesus.”

In the NT, in the book of Acts, we learn about a sorcerer named “Bar-Jesus.” Bar means “son of,” so this man likely had a father named “Jesus.” (Acts 13:6)

I am sure there were many Jews throughout the years who had named their children *Jesus* so that they would remember that “Yahweh is salvation.” But the naming of Jesus by God through the angel Gabriel was different.

His name was given not so that he or others would be reminded that “God is salvation,” though that is a good thing, this name was given because this baby would be the **source** of salvation for the world.

In short, what the Bible is saying is that this baby **is** Yahweh. He is Emmanuel, God come down to us in human flesh” and that is why he has been given the name “Jesus.”

- You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. (v.31)

This child would literally fulfill the meaning of that name.

The Dilemma

The news from Gabriel was difficult for Mary to hear. The text tells us that the angel greeted her as “you who are highly favored.” (v. 28)

Mary did not feel that way.

She was a young, poor, struggling peasant woman who was betrothed to a man named Joseph.

A betrothal in the day of Mary was similar to an engagement in our culture, except they were more binding, reflected a higher degree of commitment and fidelity, lasted longer, and did not involve sleeping or living together before the wedding. The betrothal was so serious that it actually took a certificate of divorce to end it.

How could Mary feel “favored” knowing that she would be with child even though she was still a virgin?

What would people think when Joseph, the man who she was betrothed to, found out about her pregnancy and issued her a certificate of divorce?

This situation had the potential to bring about great shame in her life. Mary was terrified to receive the news from Gabriel.

We know from Matthew’s gospel that that was exactly what Joseph was going to do. He was going to quietly divorce his wife-to-be; that is until God spoke to him through an angel and told him the same thing that he told Mary. This pregnancy was not the result of adultery, it was the result of the Holy Spirit of God coming upon Mary and creating a child within her. (v.35) Her birth would be a virgin birth.

The Necessity of the Virgin Birth

This doctrine is greatly disputed in the church as to how necessary it is to believe. It goes a good way back to when the old northern Presbyterian Church decided in the 1920’s to not require it as an essential belief for its ministers and elders.

In William Barclay’s commentary on this passage, a very famous Bible commentator that many Presbyterians are familiar with, he says that it is not necessary to believe in the virgin birth literally.

To be fair, Barclay does rightly acknowledge that the birth narratives state that Mary was a virgin, that she had not slept with Joseph, and that according to the story the situation posed a real dilemma for the couple. This is what the text “says” Barclay would agree, but he goes on to say that it can “mean” something quite different. I quote him here, “It may be that we will prefer to think of it as a beautiful way of stressing the presence of the Spirit of God in family life.” (Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study-Luke*, p. 7)

This is most unfortunate.

I agree that a text may not always literally mean what it says because the Bible does use imagery, metaphors, and parables. But it is clear from the gospel readings that none of the birth narratives were written like that. It is clear that that they were written as real historical narrative.

So to deny the virgin birth, or to say that it means something else different, that it is just symbolic of some kind of generic truth, is to deny the historicity of the Bible's account of Jesus' birth. It would mean that there was no dilemma at all for Mary and Joseph because she never got pregnant during her betrothal to begin with! In short, to deny the virgin birth is to deny authority and inspiration of the Bible. You might be able to go there but I can't.

For me the issue is Jesus Christ really God in human flesh?

Logically speaking, if he is the eternal son of God come down to us in human flesh, then it would seem to me that it would necessitate a virgin birth in order to reflect the reality that Jesus came from the bosom of the Father. It would also seem to me that the vicious cycle of human sin that is passed down from one generation to the next could not be broken without it. So without the virgin birth we have a Jesus **with** a sinful nature. That fact alone would necessitate a virgin birth.

Practically speaking, why can't God make a virgin birth happen? Can God not perform a miracle? Is God not free to break the laws of nature that He has set in place? If God is not free to do so, or if God is too weak to do it, then perhaps the bodily resurrection of Jesus is also a myth that is meant to be taken "symbolically." The problem with that is that Paul says that if Jesus didn't rise from the grave, bodily, then we are dead in our sins and our faith is futile.

For me I can't go down this slippery slope path of denying the authority and inspiration of the Bible. I believe the Bible is the Word of God and that the gospel accounts of Jesus' birth are true.

Nor could I go on believing in a weak God who is incapable of doing the miraculous. We give up far too much when we give up the virgin birth of Mary. Our whole salvation is staked on it. Without it how can Jesus be God? And if he is not God then how can he save us from our sins?

Christmas Gospel

This is what is at stake at Christmas. Does this baby- who is both fully human and fully God in human flesh- who has come into this world, really save us from our sins? I believe with all my heart that the answer is yes.

It is certainly true that all human beings are sinners. All we have to do is look at our own lives, watch the news, or read the papers.

I also believe the Bible is true when it says that our sin separates us from God and that we deserve God's judgment for our sins. That judgment is death. But I also believe that God is merciful and that He is desirous of forgiving people and saving them from their sins. So God sent himself into the world through the gift of His eternal Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him God did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Jesus accomplished our salvation through his sinless life lived on our behalf. His sinless life stands in place of our sinful lives. And through his perfect sacrifice on the cross for our sins his death paid the penalty that our sins were owed and it satisfied the Father's wrath on our sins.

Surely he took up our infirmities,
And carried our sorrows,
Yet we considered him stricken by God,
Smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
And by his wounds we are healed.

-Isaiah 53:4-5

His name is Jesus. He came into this world to die for your sins, and he will save you from your sins and give you life with God, if you will but trust him.

That is the gospel message of Christmas. Would you believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ today?

Amen.