

## **A Savior Christmas**

December 23, 2018

As you drive through the neighborhoods I am sure you have noticed the colored lights on houses or in the yards. People have put up evergreen trees, real or imitation, and decorated them with all kinds of different objects. Many have presents under them for family members and friends. Some people put up wreaths on their doors. Many are enjoying parties and family get-togethers. All of these things are part of our traditional and cultural Christmas observances. They are all nice, but they don't really have much to do with the original meaning of Christmas.

As Christians we should be trying to communicate to the world the main point of Christmas. That is our subject this morning.

We have two passages in the New Testament that announce the birth of Jesus. They are very different from each other. The first, in Matthew's gospel, is centered on Joseph. The second, in Luke's gospel, is centered more on Mary.

Matthew's account tells us of the magi. Luke's account tells of the angel announcement to the shepherds. Matthew's account has the focus on Judea, while Luke's has them living in Nazareth. This is not a conflict. Joseph was from Judea and Mary was from Nazareth. He had gone to Nazareth to get her and bring her back to Judea.

They were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. From there they went to Egypt.

**Matthew 2:19-23 (NIV) After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.**

It appears that Joseph had planned to live in Judea. It is only when he learns that Herod's son is king that he fears going there. So they are led by God to live in Galilee. They end up in Nazareth. In addition to being where Mary is from, it is a small, out-of-the-way town in the hill country.

When we compare the Matthew and Luke accounts we find two things in common that are revealed by God.

### **1. The baby was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. (Mt 1:20; Lk 1:35)**

Both Joseph and Mary are told this. Both needed to be convinced that this was an act of God, not of man.

### **2. They were to name Him Jesus. (Mt 1:21; Lk 1:31)**

This was told to both Joseph and Mary. Jesus was a common name at that time in history in Israel. And it was often given in honor of Yahweh, the God of the Jews. You may not make the connection if you don't know the meaning of the name Jesus.

**The name Jesus is derived from the Latin "*Jesus*" as a transliteration of the Greek *Iesous*. The Greek form is a rendering of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, a variant of the earlier name *Yehoshua*, or in English, "Joshua". Joshua means "Yah saves". *Yah* is a shortened form of the name *Yahweh*, God's personal name.**

Most people in those days only had one name. They did not have a family name, like Smith or Jones or Shifflett. So how would you tell one Jesus from another Jesus? A person's single name was often supplemented other information. It might be connected to the person's father's name or hometown or occupation.

Jesus' neighbors refer to Jesus in the gospels as "Joseph's son" or "the carpenter's son" or simply "the carpenter" (Mt 13:55, Mk 6:3; Luke 4:22). By people outside of his hometown Jesus is most often referred to as "Jesus of Nazareth". He was the Jesus from the town of Nazareth.

While someone might name their son with this description of what God is like, that wasn't the case for Joseph's son. The angel gave a different reason for naming him Jesus.

**Matthew 1:21 (NIV) ... you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

This Jesus would be a savior. This is what the shepherds were told by the angel.

**Luke 2:11 (NIV) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you...**

What kind of savior He would be they were not told. A savior is one who saves. A policeman is a savior if he saves you from a robber. A fireman is a savior if he saves you from a fire. A doctor is a savior if he saves you from an infection. A lifeguard is a savior if he saves you from drowning.

It is likely that the adults in these passages heard the news of a savior as good news. They were hoping for a national savior. They pictured a Messiah king who would run the occupying Roman army out of Israel. They wanted Israel to be free again with Messiah on the throne. Many Jews wanted a political savior, one who would unite the various political factions in Israel.

One day Jesus will do both of these. One day Jesus will return and take up his throne, not only over Israel but over all the earth. He will rule justly in righteousness.

But the primary meaning of Jesus as savior was as a savior from sins. That is what was revealed to Joseph.

**Matthew 1:21 (NIV) ... you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

This is the most significant aspect of who Jesus is. Jesus wasn't going to save them from a physical enemy, like a foreign invader. He wasn't going to save them from a plague of illness. He wasn't going to rescue them from financial poverty. He was going to save them from their sins.

Jesus is a savior because He willingly gave up His life to pay the penalty for all of our sins. Even Joseph, who was called a righteous man by Matthew, if he was completely honest about his spiritual condition, would admit his need for a savior from sin.

All of us need a savior, even those who had been brought up in Judaism to obey the Law of Moses. This was the key truth revealed to the apostles of Jesus. When they met in the Jerusalem in Acts 15 to discuss the relationship of the Law of Moses to non-Jewish Christians, one of the apostles made this admission:

**Acts 15:10 (NIV) Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the (non-Jewish) disciples a yoke that neither we (Jews) nor our fathers have been able to bear?**

He admitted that no Jew had been able to keep the Law of Moses. Rather than making them right with God, the Law of Moses declared them guilty of sin and condemned them to death. The answer to this problem was not more Law of Moses. Instead, they needed a savior. And in the next verse he concludes as much.

**Acts 15:11 (NIV) No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved...**

Joseph, name the child Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. His name is the most significant aspect of the Christmas story. In fact we only celebrate Christmas at all because of Jesus' death and resurrection. If he had not died for our sins, there would never have been any Christmas celebrations anywhere.

Many people today want to emphasize something else about Jesus. Some people focus on the ethical teachings of Jesus for better interpersonal relationships. They point to the Sermon on the Mount especially for this. They miss the meaning of His name. They ignore the cross.

Others hold him up as a doer of kind deeds, ministering to the poor and persecuted. They too miss the meaning of His name and ignore the cross.

Still others focus on Jesus as a prophet like those in the Old Testament who did miracles by the power of God. They too miss the main thing. They too miss the meaning of his name and ignore the cross.

Jesus did all of these things. But they were all in support of His main purpose.

**Jesus became a savior by dying for our sins.** THIS was the message that the followers of Jesus took to the world after his resurrection.

**1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV) Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...**

THIS is the most significant aspect of who Jesus is.

**The most important fact of Christmas is Jesus as a savior.**

This is what we charged with taking to the world. This the message we at Emmanuel Baptist Church are teaching and preaching. Through our missionaries we are doing it around the world. That is why we support them financially and with our prayers. It is also the message we should try to communicate to our friends and families in the midst of the other ways we celebrate Christmas. Let's use trees to communicate Jesus as savior. Let's use lights to communicate Jesus as savior. Let's use family get-togethers to communicate Jesus as savior.

Let's use the Christmas story to communicate Jesus as savior. The most important fact of Christmas is not the angel appearances. It is not the shepherds or the magi. It is not even the virgin birth. The main fact is that Jesus is named Jesus because he would die as the basis for our salvation from sins.

The Christmas passages in Matthew and Luke are about the coming, the beginning, of the gift of a savior. Let us never forget that. In the midst of all the cultural and traditional aspects of Christmas, let us never forget the most important fact of Christmas. God sent us a savior.

This is what we need to communicate about Christmas. This is the message our world needs to know. Let us pray for opportunities to share that good news with someone this year in the midst of our Christmas celebrations.