

## NAMING THE CHILD

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I met a guy the other day who said his wife hasn't spoken to him since last Christmas. Seeing me puzzled he explained, "Last year I asked her what she wanted for Christmas and she said, 'Surprise me.' So on Christmas Eve at 3 a.m. in leaned over into her ear and shouted, 'Boo!'" Hasn't spoken to him since. Nope.

It's Christmas Eve and it's going to be very hard for me to surprise you in this message. You know the Bible's story for this evening. I'm not going to try to surprise you but I would ask you to listen and think with me for just eight minutes because I do have something to say that is important to you and me and this world. I believe it with all my heart.

Let's pray. God, it's our custom to ask you to help me say what you want me to say and to ask you to help us all to hear what you want us to hear. We could try it on our own but you do offer your help and so we ask for it. In Jesus' name.

I'm going to read a few verses from the first book of the NT, Matthew.

Pretty simply I'd like us to note first that **God names Jesus Jesus**. He's the real father and that's the name he gives him. It's a Greek from of the name Joshua which means God Saves. Someone told me this morning that my name Jeff means precious gift. Joshua, Jesus means God Saves. The messenger added, "Because he will save people from their sin."

Sometimes I'll be a little sideways to connect with a teenager, like when we have the Teen Challenge youth here. I'll ask, "What's your name?" Answer: "Bill." Then I'll ask, "You sure it's not Steve?" No, Bill. "Are you sure? How do you know?" My parents named me Bill, called me Bill, it's Bill!

If the parents name him Bill, it's Bill, not Steve. If God named Jesus Jesus, it's Jesus. If God named him that, who are we to call him something else? It isn't, "Wispy Moral Guy... who helps people be nice." Steve is a nice name but it isn't Bill. The guy's name was Bill. Jesus name is Jesus, God saves. Face that name.

The name God gives him (God Saves) presents us, yes, with claims a) that he is God and b) he can save. But also that we are a) sinners and b) we need saving.

As much as it embarrasses me to say that I'm a screw up who needs help, I know it, and I know the world is screwed up, and I'm pretty sure you are, and we all need help; it doesn't seem very crazy to say, "I, and we, are sinners." Not everyone agrees.

But that we can be effectively saved or that this isn't just a natural state of affairs, that is something else. What Jesus says, and people from the NT on have said, is that he creates a change that is profound and he does it like no one else. He does it at the level of soul, where our problems all start. There's a kind of help in education and in technology, but it doesn't offer spiritual help. The help we need is something/someone to change our hearts. (Did you hear, "something/someone to change our hearts"? It's really *someone*. Hearts are less changed by something and are really changed by someone.)

Really consider that Jesus can do a work in human hearts and give him a try in yours.

Notice second that **Joseph steps up for Jesus**. He accepted what the angel said, Mary as his wife, the baby when he came, and then named him Jesus as instructed. Whatever people wanted to think, whether it was “Adoptive Father” or “He and Mary jumped the gun and cooked up a story about an angel,” in all that he did, he was stepping up to the plate.

Everyone’s doing some stepping with respect to Jesus. Some up, some down. You are. I am. The person sitting next to you.

You see Christ came into Joseph and Mary’s world. He comes into ours giving us life, including an inner life, character, spirit. Joseph and Mary had to figure out what to do with the reality Jesus put on their hands. We have to figure out what to do with the life he puts on ours.

I think of it as spiritual formation. We all have a spiritual life, a character, and it is being shaped or we are shaping it every single day. Mother Theresa had a spiritual formation. Adolph Hitler had one. You have one.

Charlie Brown said, “There is no problem so big that I cannot ignore.” We may try to ignore that we have a spirit, a character, and that we are responsible for it but that is the truth. Wishing it weren’t so doesn’t make it not so. The very full thought is this – You and I are responsible for our character, for the kind of people we are becoming, and our spiritual abilities. Joseph recognized this, recognized Jesus and stepped up. Will you and I?

Ponder lastly that **Jesus stepped up for Joseph**.  
God names Jesus Jesus. Joseph stepped up for Jesus. Jesus stepped up for Joseph.

I have a friend who had a stepfather who came into his life when he was three or four years old. He said of him, "I'd look up from basketball practice as a five year old and I'd see him through the window on the gym door having stopped from work and checking on me. He did that sort of thing my whole life. I love him." You could feel it as he said it.

Joseph was there for Jesus, looking through some Palestine equivalent of a gym door window. There are only sixteen verses in the NT referencing Joseph and in the adult part of Jesus' life Jesus' mother and siblings are mentioned, but not Joseph. The thought is that he died.

One can only wonder if Jesus was actually present at the moment of Joseph's passing, if he gripped Joseph's hand in assurance the way many times Joseph had probably gripped his. Traditions outside the Bible, like the apocryphal book, *The History of the Carpenter*, paint the picture just that way. One can wonder if Jesus said to Joseph as energy was slipping away from his body, "In my other father's home there are many rooms, if it were not so I would have told you so."

***I believe it with  
all my heart.***

We don't know what happened for sure with Jesus and Joseph. But we do know that Jesus was a person who stepped up for others. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus he stepped up for her. He told the accusers, "You who is without sin cast the first

stone,” and then stooped and wrote in the dust. Some say he wrote in that dust the word, “Mom,” remembering what the family had gone through with her strange pregnancy of him. Joseph’s example probably flashed before his mind, the way he had stood up for Mary. Look, if Jesus stood up for that woman, and he did, her and many others, then he certainly stood up for his father Joseph.

Jesus, of course, didn’t just learn about standing up from his *stepfather*. It was in his DNA from his *heavenly father*. The whole point of Jesus’ coming was to stand with people and stand up for people ... and that included Joseph ... and here’s the message in a nutshell: it *includes* you and me. He stood up for us. He stands up for us.

The message of Christmas is Jesus, that he entered the world to have all of us know that the God behind all of this is behind you and me, the God who stepped into the world in Jesus is the one who steps into your world and mine ... and surprise, when he steps in he steps up for you and me.

Trust that and your life will be different. Amen.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.*

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