

## **He Shall Be Called**

David Flatt

Parents have many decisions to make for their children. Some decisions can be very stressful. One that is important, but enjoyable is choosing a name. Names represent our family. In time, names carry a reputation. Names symbolize all that we are.

When Mary was pregnant with her child, she and Joseph did not pick a name for their baby. Instead, the angel of the Lord told Joseph the name he was to give to the child:

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus” (Matt. 1:20-25).

There are two names identified in this text for the child bore by Mary: Jesus and Immanuel. Both names are significant in relaying the identity, character, and purpose of this child.

### **“Jesus”**

There are roughly 150 names and titles given to the child who Mary birthed. The most recognized name is “Jesus.” Depending on the language, this ancient name took the form of Jesus, Joshua, Yeshua, and Iesous. This name was common in Israel. It was the name of the great military commander that led the conquest of Canaan: Joshua.

Joshua’s name has an interesting story. Before he became the great military commander of Israel, he was one of the twelve men selected to spy on Canaan. However, his name was not Joshua. His name was Hoshea, meaning, “May Jehovah save.” When Hoshea was chosen as a spy, for some unknown reason, Moses changed Hoshea’s name to “Joshua”, meaning, “Jehovah is salvation” (Num. 13:16). While no one knows why the name change was done, Joshua seems to have a more sure, certain, dogmatic meaning than Hoshea.

Many years later, the One who would defeat the devil, conquer death, and lead God’s people to the promised rest was given the name Jesus. When the angel named this child, he emphasized the name of the child and His purpose: “For He shall save His people from their sins.” Jesus is our great Commander, Victor, and Savior.

### **“Immanuel”**

The lesser known of the two names given to this child is “Immanuel.” While this name may be lesser known today, this was not the case among Israel. Immanuel was the name given

to the eagerly anticipated Messiah centuries earlier as recorded by the prophet Isaiah. To my knowledge, this was not a commonly given name to Israelites. This is due to the name's significant meaning: "God with us." The meaning and implication of this name cannot be overstated. Consider the following...

**1. Jesus is GOD.** The meaning of the birth of Jesus first and foremost is that Jesus is God. All the blessings of Jesus flow from this singular reality that Jesus is God. Jesus' divinity was acknowledged at His birth. For example, the angels, shepherds, and wise men present at the birth of Jesus did not accept worship. They worshipped Jesus because He was God come to earth.

As an adult during His public ministry, Jesus said, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins" (John 8:23-24). On another occasion, Jesus was criticized for forgiving a man's sins. When people heard Jesus do this, immediately, they understood Jesus to be claiming to be God (Luke 5:20-26).

After His death, resurrection, and ascension, disciples believed Jesus was God. John introduced Jesus as being the Word. He wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-2, 14).

The nature, power, and authority of Immanuel are bound in this aspect of His name. Jesus is GOD. If we reject Jesus, we reject God. We cannot have God without obeying Jesus. The apostle Peter aptly recognized this truth when he said, "...there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

**2. Jesus is God WITH us.** Since the sin of Adam of Eve, being in the presence of God became terrifying. We think of the prophets falling in fear before God or thunder and lightning at Mt. Siani. Yet, by the birth of Jesus, God came to the world in human form.

The all-powerful Creator lowered Himself to the form of a child. This is overwhelming and unusual. From this perspective, the birth of Jesus reveals the tenderness and joy of God. Like when the aged priest, Simeon, God wants us to take Him up into our arms and hug Him close to our hearts. Imagine if Moses could have read the first chapter of Matthew!

**3. Jesus is God with US.** Pay close attention to the meaning of "Immanuel." The name does not mean God with "all", but God with "us." "Us" is an exclusive term. The gospel of John says that Jesus came to His own people, but they rejected Him. Who are the "us?"

"Us" are those who have answered Jesus' invitation. Those who are humble. Those who have nothing. Those who are willing to give everything. Shepherds. Wisemen. Believers.

## **Conclusion**

Birth stories have sentimental value for most people. This can be problematic, especially when reflecting on the birth of Jesus. Sentimentality can hijack our hearts. Instead of addressing the condition of our hearts, the birth story of Jesus can put us to sleep. We will miss the profound reality and importance of the birth of our Savior.