

“What’s in a Name?”

Christmas Eve 2018

Luke 2:21 - “On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.”

When I was younger, my parents reminded me that if I had been born a girl, I would have had another name. Julie or Jennifer, or something like that. Probably the same feminine name my brother, Matt, would have had if he had been born a girl, and possibly the same name they would have used for my younger brother, Todd. Alas, there was no need for a girl’s name at that point in the Falker family.

Picking names is interesting. Most parents look up the meaning before they choose them. Eric, for example, means “ruler,” as in, a king or leader, not as in a tool to draw straight lines on a paper, although I’m cool with that meaning, too. Matthew means, “gift of God.” Todd means “clever or willy one,” literally, “a fox.” However, in many cultures around the world, names are not chosen until quite some time after birth, and even changed when a person reaches adulthood. Native North American cultures, especially, have some great names.

However, with Jesus, there were no alternate names. Nine months ahead of time, the angel told Mary, “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” (Luke 1:31). Why “Jesus,” exactly? There were other good Jewish boy names. Actually, the Christmas story in Matthew gives us a fuller explanation. The angel of the Lord tells Joseph to name his son Jesus, because “he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21.)

The Hebrew word for Jesus is Yeshua, which we also translate as Joshua. It literally means, “Yahweh saves.” The Lord saves. If ever a person was born with a name to live up to, it was Jesus. Jesus saved us from our sins by dying on a cross to redeem us. I’d say that was the perfect name for him.

However, the Bible has many others names for Jesus. In fact, one of the Advent Calendars I used this month lists 24 different names or titles for Christ. What I want to do tonight is simple. I want to read these 24 names, for each is the fulfillment of a significant need that we all have. Just as the name Jesus answers the question, “Who can save us from our sin?” there are other names that tell us why Jesus is all we need. Let’s read them now.

(Based on “Names of Jesus Advent Calendar” – Compiled by David Mead, Creative Communications for the Parish, 2015)

1. Do you feel conquered and weak? Revelation 5:5 says, “The Lion of Judah has conquered.”
2. Do you feel alone? Isaiah 7:14 says “His name is Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.”
3. Do you feel overwhelmed by war and violence in this world? Isaiah 9:6 says, “His name shall be called ‘Prince of Peace.’”
4. Do you long for justice in the world? Malachi 4:2 says, “The Sun of Righteousness shall rise.”
5. Do you feel left out? Isaiah 49:7 says, “The Holy One has chosen you.”
6. Do you feel worthless? Job 19:25 says, “I know that My Redeemer lives.”
7. Do you know someone who would sacrifice themselves to save you? John 1:29 says, “Behold, the Lamb of God.”
8. Are you hungry for meaning? Jesus says in John 6:35, “I am the Bread of Life.”

9. Is your world dark? In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World."
10. Is your way blocked? Jesus says in John 10:7, "I am the Door of the sheep."
11. Do you need protection and guidance? In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd."
12. Do you want connection to eternal life? In John 15:1, Jesus says, "I am the true Vine."
13. Does your soul feel dead inside? Jesus says in John 11:25, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."
14. Is your world full of lies and misdirection? In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."
15. Do you want to know the greatest person who ever lived? Jesus says in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I AM."
16. Do you want God to enter your world? Luke 1:35 says, "The child will be called the Son of God."
17. Do you want to celebrate? In Matthew 21:9, the crowds shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David."
18. Do you want to be in the presence of royalty? Revelation 17:14 says, "He is King of Kings."
19. Do you want to know the ultimate leader? Revelation 19:16 says, "He has a name: Lord of lords."
20. Are you worried about your future? Jesus says in Revelation 1:8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega."
21. Do you want to see God in person? In John 20:28, Thomas called Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

22. Do you need rescuing? John 4:42 says, “This is indeed the Savior of the world.”
23. Have you received the greatest present ever given? The angel says in Luke 2:11, “Unto you is born Christ the Lord.”
24. Will you let him remove your sin? The angel said in Matthew 1:21, “Name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

There are many more names for Jesus, but the most important name is the one that you call him. Whether it is Savior, Lord, my God, or all of the above, the one thing you have to know tonight is that Jesus is the Answer to everything struggle, every doubt, every failure, every sin and burden that you carry inside. God knows that we could not save ourselves. So tonight, we remember again the way God entered the world, as a human, a baby, born in a small village on the other side of the world, who grew up to become a man who lived and loved and sacrificed himself on a cruel cross so that those who believed in him would have eternal life and purpose.

Tonight you have the opportunity to let Jesus take over your life. You can live for yourself if you wish. God allows everyone that choice. But if you want to experience the greatest love ever, to know the presence of a loving, forgiving, glorious, awesome God, tonight is your chance. Tonight you can say, “Yes, Jesus, I love you. Come, fill my life and teach me to live for you.”

Christmas Blessing

“We worship the birth of a baby,
and in doing so acknowledge

God reaching down to touch the earth
and bless it once again;
to walk within the garden
as once he did in Eden.

We worship the birth of a Savior,
an infant in whose fragility
lay all the signs of sacrifice;
born in humility,
growing into his kingdom
as Scripture's Promised One.

We worship Jesus, Savior and King.”¹

May your light shine brightly
And may you experience the Christmas blessing
Of Love and Life in Jesus the Christ. Amen.

¹ http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Christmas.htm#ixzz5aZTBMPss