

## What's in a Name? Matthew 1:18-25

There are some names that you can look up in the dictionary and you will find something like: "Someone who does . . . . The name came about because the original bearer of that name was engaged in an occupation that bore that name. For instance, people named Cooper share the name with someone who first made or repaired barrels or flasks. Millers were those who milled grain, Smith is a metal worker, Mason, a stone worker or brick layer and so forth. Obviously not everyone with a name tied to a profession still practices that profession, but it doesn't take away from how the name was given.

The name of Jesus was also given, because the person to whom the name would be given would do something. Jesus is the English translation of the Greek name *Iesous*. The Greek name is a translation of the Hebrew name Joshua. And Joshua is a combination of the Hebrew word for salvation with Yahweh, the name of God. Thus Jesus means "The Lord is salvation." He would save His people for their sins.

Who are His people? Matthew presents this right after listing those people from Abraham right to Joseph, to whom the angel comes in a dream. These were the Jews whom God had promised would be a blessing to all nations. Through Abraham's offspring the Messiah, or Christ would be born. But they were hardly worthy of such a distinction. Their continued status of chosen people was certainly not earned by their good and faithful behavior. They were often rebellious, complaining, idolaters. Sure, it had been a long time since the promise of a Savior had first been given. According to verse 17 it took 42 generations. And if you count the generations going back to that promise in Eden, it was much longer than that. Still, no other so-called god had made any promises to their worshipers at all, so they were certainly better off having hope in a promise than no promise at all. And Yahweh had many times given his guidance, providence and protection, so there was no cause for faithlessness. To these people would be born the divinely conceived Jesus to save them from their sins.

But as millers mill, and a smith smiths, so a savior saves. There is a pronoun in the Greek text that gives the meaning that He himself will save his people. That is, the salvation will not be something to which we will contribute. It will not be the work of a foreign god, or an army. No one can save from sin except someone willing to take sin's punishment of death and yet be able live again to confirm the all sufficiency of that one punishment.

He himself, as His name implies, will save His people. He will do it on a cross, for there the worst sinners were punished. Those who put him on the cross were angry at him because he promised to be a Savior they didn't think they needed. "Sure, Jesus, you come with sword and an army to free us from our Roman oppressors, and we are with you. But upset our position in society with ideas about us needing to repent, that we will not stand for."

What they didn't know was that they were enacting God's planned of redemption for themselves and for all people. For whatever their reason for his death, God's

reason was salvation from sin. As Isaiah prophesied, "surely he has born the iniquities of all". This he surely did, being the embodiment of every sinner who ever lived.

Though Jesus was the savior promised to the Jews, he would be a savior for the whole world. We who are not of Jewish ancestry have the same Savior. Indeed, the story immediately following our lesson is about the coming of Gentiles from distant lands, led by a star that said, salvation is for you too. Matthew also records that Jesus healed the servant of a Roman soldier, delivered from demons the daughter of a Canaanite woman and finally commissioned his disciples to baptize and teach all of His word to every nation on earth.

We who bear the name of Jesus as a result of our baptism, now are evidence that the other name given by the angel to Joseph is also true for all believers. God With us, as Emmanuel means. Jesus is the sign of God's presence among His people. There is no verb in that name, so we don't need to wonder if God was with us, will be with us, or if he is with us now. God with us is a timeless name that points to the pervasive and permanent presence of our Savior in whatever situation we are in, in whatever state of mind we find ourselves, and wherever we are.

So a name means a lot. Especially if the bearer of that name is still living up to that name. Not all Millers still mill, nor all Smiths still smith, but our Savior still saves. He is God With Us. Always. Amen.