



Daily Devotionals

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MATTHEW 1:18-25 NAMING THE CHILD

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

In previous generations in the United States, the church, and especially liturgical traditions that practice infant baptism, had a role in guiding the naming of a child. The populace referred to their neighbors by their “Christian” names. The reality of the role of the church can be seen in relief when one considers some of the names that were given to children from the so-called Bible belt, such as the infamous Ima Hogg. In Scripture names were taken very seriously in that it was expected that the child would “grow into” his name, with the result that the name would be an accurate description of the child’s character or identity.

The birth of Jesus was a strange and dangerous affair in first century Judah in that his mother was an unmarried young woman, claiming to be having a child by God rather than her intended husband and that before they were married. By all measures this could be interpreted as adultery and be punishable by death. Yet, God had given her to a righteous and merciful man who was willing to extract himself from an embarrassing situation, but was not willing to have the young woman stoned. Being a righteous man he was open to God and being visited by an angel was convinced of the truth of Mary’s claim and his God-given role to be the human protector and provider of both mother and child. In addition, Joseph was given the identity of the child through the names drawn from the Old Testament prophecies. This child was Immanuel (“God with us”) and Jesus (“Yahweh is salvation”). In this child so named resided the fulfillment of the great divine promises of the Hebrew Scriptures – that God would dwell with his people (Exodus 29:45) and that God would redeem a people unto himself (Psalm 130:8).

The Good News about God is that he has fulfilled his promise to those who believe. This child born of Mary in Bethlehem, and raised under the protection of Joseph is the Messiah, the Promised One. In him is the salvation of the world and through him God’s kingdom has broken into the world so that we might know God and experience his Spirit in our lives.

Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen. (BCP, p. 213)