

# The Ultimate Baby Names

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Preacher: David Trimble

[ 0 : 0 0 ] I'll add my welcome to Jonathan. So my name's David, if we haven't met, and Howard here is a ministry of practice. So hello, welcome, and happy Christmas. It's great to see you here this afternoon.

So I've called this talk The Ultimate Baby Names, and I want to start by thinking about names. This will make sense in a minute. Names are important, right? I have a name. You have a name. Literally everyone you know has a name.

Even the time of year has a name. Christmas. Without names, we'd probably be rather stuck. But the last reading that we heard was from Matthew's Gospel.

It's his account of the life of Jesus. And the reading comes from really near the start of the Gospel. And in it, Matthew tells how the birth of Jesus happened.

But one of the things that Matthew's focused on is names. And perhaps this isn't that surprising. The story he's telling is about the birth of a baby.

[ 0 : 5 9 ] And when a baby's on the way, he's got to come up with a name. So here's a fun fact. In the UK, once a child is born, you have exactly 42 days to name it.

I'm not entirely sure what happens. You'll be on for 42 days. Perhaps the store takes it back. But anyway, I once knew a couple who left it right up until the very last minute to name their child.

So for 40-ish days, this baby had no name. It was just the baby, I guess. But there's quite a lot of babies in the world. So just the baby isn't really going to do.

Names give a certain specificity. They provide an identity. Your name is tied intrinsically to who you are as a person.

And so it is with Jesus. That's why Matthew makes a massive deal out of Jesus' names. I say names plural because he's given two of them, isn't he?

[ 1 : 5 9 ] The first is Jesus, which means God saves. And the second is Emmanuel, which means God with us. And these names, they kind of encapsulate the identity of this baby.

They tell us who he is and they tell us why he came. In short, they basically sum up the Christian hope of Christmas. In Jesus, God saves.

In Jesus, God is with us. So over the next few minutes, we're going to think about these two names. We're going to try and understand what they really mean and why they're still important all these Christmases later.

So the first name this baby is given is Jesus. That's the one that we're basically all familiar with. It's the name the baby went by as he grew up into a boy and as he grew up into a man. And our passage even begins with the words, This is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, came about.

And then later in the story, verse 20, we're told, An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife.

- [ 3 : 10 ] Because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. And you're to give him the name of Jesus. Because he will save his people from their sins.
- And so as we said, the name Jesus means God saves. And that's why the angel tells Joseph that the baby is going to be named Jesus.
- The reason given is that this baby will save his people from their sins. And this tells us two things. It tells us, one, that the baby Jesus is God himself.
- And it tells us, secondly, that this God baby will save his people. Jesus, God saves. But let's back it up a bit.
- We're fairly familiar with the nativity story. But let's not ignore the fact that this is actually quite strange. A virgin becomes pregnant. A child is conceived through the power of God's Holy Spirit.
- [ 4 : 12 ] An angel appears giving baby name advice. That's not being around the bush. For most people, this is frankly unbelievable. And the Bible's not suggesting that this is normal.
- In fact, the Bible goes out of its way to show us just how strange it is. These events are extraordinary because of the scale of what's going on.
- God himself, the creator of the cosmos, has been born as a baby. Why? To save his people from their sins. So the Bible's making massive, massive claims here.
- But they're claims that drive the root problem with humanity. Which is the sin problem. Sin's quite a theological word, isn't it?
- So what exactly is sin? For one thing, we know it's a problem that's so big that Jesus was born to save us from it. But the rest of the Bible tells us a little bit more.
- [ 5 : 12 ] Sin is the problem at the heart of everything, really. Sin is the reason our world is such a mess. It's the reason that there is so much pain and so much suffering.
- And it's the reason that this Christmas, not everyone's going to be happy. And not everyone's going to be well. Sin is, in many ways, a monster. Sin is the reason that we're going to be happy. And sadly, it's a monster of our own making.
- I think it's probably pretty standard to see ourselves as essentially good people. But I wonder, who here hasn't done deeds that they are ashamed of? Who here hasn't thought thoughts that were cruel or mean-spirited?
- And who here hasn't said something that they knew was wrong? I mean, clearly, clearly none of us are perfect. But you might come back and ask, is that a problem?
- We probably tend to see our lives as a pile of good things and a pile of bad things. And I guess most of us assume that our pile of good things is much bigger than the pile of bad.
- [ 6 : 18 ] And it's a comforting thought. Well, I think it's probably a hollow one. In reality, the monster of sin is more than just a pile of bad things.
- Sin is an act of rebellion and a broken relationship with God. You're often in films, we're on the side of the rebels.
- Has anyone seen the new Star Wars film yet? Yeah. Yeah. I'm not asking for spoilers. I've not seen it yet. But when I do, I think I'm going to be coming for the rebels rather than for the evil empire.
- Well, the difference in the real world is that rebellion against God is rebellion against perfection. This rebellion is actually not a rebellion that we should want to be a part of.
- But unfortunately, we are. The Bible talks about how we as humans are slaves to sin. We are slaves to doing what God doesn't want us to do.
- [ 7 : 17 ] Because whilst we might think of our pile of good things as being pretty good, it's really not. In fact, our world is so messed up that we often can't see just how wrong that we are.

I assume a lot of us have seen the John Lewis Christmas advert. I quite enjoyed seeing the story of Edgar and the excitable dragon. For those who haven't seen it, the story is something like this.

Edgar and the dragon are really excited about Christmas. And when Christmassy things are going on, he just wants to get involved. We can understand that. But when he gets excited, he ends up ruining everything because fire spurts out of his nose.

He is, after all, a dragon. So he wants to hellbill the snowman. He ends up melting it. He wants to ice skate on a frozen lake. He ends up unfreezing it and all the children fall in.

He wants to see the Christmas tree go up at the centre of the village. He ends up burning it to a crisp. And sin can be a bit like that.

[ 8 : 22 ] It's like a monstrous fire that rages inside of us. And we're powerless to stop it. Now the advert has a happy ending where Edgar sets a Christmas pudding alive.

But in the real world, the fire of sin can't be easily repurposed for good. But it can't be repurposed for good. Look at our world. Full of broken relationships.

Full of loneliness. Full of hatred. Full of selfishness. Full of sin. Our sin ruins everything.

And the truth is, our hearts are stained by sin. Because day after day, we rebel against God's goodness. It's a cancer that we cannot heal.

Now this all sounds rather miserable. But I'm setting the scene to show why Jesus came to save us. He came to save us from our sins.

[ 9 : 24 ] In dealing with the sin problem, Jesus is dealing with the problem at the root of everything that is wrong with the world. In dealing with sin, Jesus is dealing with the problem at the root of our hearts.

And God's desire at Christmas is that we recognise three things. We recognise that there is a problem with our world and with ourselves.

We recognise that that problem is sin. We recognise that Jesus came to save people from the sin problem. Well, the question that follows on after that is, how does Jesus deal with it?

And that's answered in his other name, Emmanuel. So if you look down at verse 22 of the passage, it says, All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has said through the prophet.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and he will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. So the fact that Jesus has given the name Emmanuel, God with us, is important, I think, for two reasons.

[ 10 : 30 ] The first is the staggering meaning of the name, God with us. And the second is its connection to prophecy. And both help to explain just how Jesus deals with the sin problem.

Let's look at the prophecy idea first. Before Jesus was born, so well over 2,000 years ago, there were people in what is now Israel-Palestine who God spoke to.

Prophets. And we heard through a couple of them in our first two readings. We heard from Isaiah, and we heard from Micah. In the passage we've been looking at, Isaiah is quoted.

And he writes, The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and it will call him Emmanuel. Now that was written about 700 years before Jesus was even alive. And so the fact that these words were written about Jesus, so long before his birth, shows that what happened at the first Christmas wasn't random.

The first Christmas didn't happen in a vacuum. It was anticipated. When sin first entered the world, God promised that someone would one day fix it.

[ 11 : 40 ] And the whole Bible story is anticipating a saviour. But it becomes very clear, as the Bible story goes on, that no human is capable of fixing this problem.

Because all humanity is chained to the monster of sin. And that's where Jesus comes in. Because he's the only one who can fix it.

God himself. God with us. Kids get really excited for a Christmas morning. Maybe you still do as a grown-up, actually. But kids especially get excited for a Christmas morning, get excited in the build-up.

So as soon as December hits, they know that it's only 25 days till Santa shows up with presents. As the month rolls on, there's more and more Christmassy things that are going on. The trees go up, the lights go on, mince pies are hitting the shops, the school's out, and the stockings are hung up on the mantelpiece.

Until it's one more sleep until Christmas. That's 25 days. Imagine waiting thousands and thousands of years for the first Christmas. That's what God's people had been doing.

[ 12 : 50 ] They didn't know exactly what that first Christmas would be like. And they didn't know exactly when it would be. But they knew that Christmas was coming. They knew Emmanuel was going to be born.

The child who would save us from our sin and fix the world. Jesus came as a human because in order to deal with the sin problem, a price had to be paid.

God is just and he has to punish evil. And he doesn't use our scale to see if our good outweighs our bad. His standards are better and fairer. But because of our sin and rebellion, we fall so far short of them.

But God is perfectly good and unbelievably kind. Jesus came to take the punishment. The punishment had to be borne by a human because humanity were responsible for sin.

So Jesus becomes God with us in order to offer us a way out. He took the punishment so that we don't have to.

[ 13 : 58 ] And his death in our place restores our relationship with God. We've already mentioned some of the Christmas adverts. Some I enjoy.

But on the whole, I find them quite frustrating. I don't know about you. So I think they encapsulate, for me, the problems with contemporary Christmas celebrations. They're full of lovely sentiments and sweetness.

But often such sentiment kind of rings hollow. Especially as the messages of Christmas goodwill are weaponised to sell products. Whether it's John Lewis or Sainsbury's or Aldi or whoever it is making these ads.

I love Christmas. I really love it. I love everything that goes on. But I often wonder if the turkey, the tinsel, the tree and the trimmings, more often than not, blind us to the world's problems for one day of the year?

Christmas, in many ways, lets us paper over the cracks with sentiment. The Christian understanding of Christmas is different. There are problems in our world.

[ 15 : 04 ] And these problems have their root in our sin. But Christmas is not about covering them in wrapping paper and pretending that they don't exist. Christmas is actually about facing up to those problems and fixing them.

That's what Jesus came to do. And that's why Christmas really is the most wonderful time of the year. So we've seen how the names Jesus was given bring hope.

They reveal Jesus' identity as God with us. They reveal Jesus' purpose as the God who came to save us. And they reveal the necessity and the cost of salvation from our sin.

So I just want to finish by saying that the gift of salvation is not one to be refused lightly. Jesus came not to judge but to be judged on our behalf. And he calls people to trust in him.

But for those who don't trust in him, he will come a second time. And then he will come to judge. So this Christmas I hope that you'll consider the gift of salvation.

[ 16 : 14 ] Or if you're unsure but intrigued, why don't I do some more digging? It's like a present under the Christmas tree. It's not worth throwing out until you've opened the wrapping paper to see exactly what it is.

And chances are, once opened, you'll realise it's something to be treasured. Without Jesus, we can't have a lovely Christmas. But it can never do more than just paper over the cracks.

With Jesus, the full force of Christmas gives us hope for something brighter. So I hope you have a wonderful Christmas and enjoy it.