

## MATT 1.25: JOSEPH NAMED HIM JESUS

[Chelmsford Carols by Candlelight 19 December 2010]

I feel sorry for Joseph.

In some ways he's the real hero of the Christmas story.

He stood by his wife when most fair-minded men would have sent their wives packing.

And yet, it's his wife who gets all the limelight.

You look at the Christmas cards you receive this year.

If they are at all religious, then for the most part all the emphasis is on Mary – and the baby, of course. Joseph, if he features at all stands in the background.

And yet Joseph had a vital role to play.

- Joseph forms a great model for husbands – he stood by his wife when things were extraordinarily complicated – if there were more Josephs around, we would have far fewer divorces today
- Joseph forms a great model for fathers - he may not have sired Jesus, but he brought him up in such a way so that when Jesus spoke of God, he spoke of God as father

However, tonight, the key point which I want to make is this: Joseph followed the advice of the angel and **named** his Son **Jesus** (v25).

Actually, he didn't really name him **Jesus**, for Jesus is a Greek name – but rather Joseph will have called him by the Hebrew name of **Yeshua**: i.e. Joshua.

Today if a couple were to call their child Jesus, people would think them a little odd, to put it mildly.

For us Jesus is a very special name, which belongs only to one person, Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph.

But at the time when Jesus was born 'Jesus' or 'Yeshua' was a common name - it was almost like calling a child Jack or Peter.

- For instance, Josephus the Jewish historian tells us that of the 28 high priests who held office from the reign of Herod the Great to the fall of the temple in AD 70, no fewer than four bore the name of Jesus.
- In addition Josephus mentions several other Jesus' – among them a general, a priest's son, and the robber who died on the Cross, whom we normally call Barabbas, but whose full-name was Jesus Barabbas – Jesus son of Abbas.

But although Jesus was a common name, Joseph chose the name Jesus because it had a special meaning. Jesus – or Yeshua – means 'God saves'. As the angel said to Joseph: "**You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins**".

Or to be more accurate, the angel said: "**You shall call his name Jesus, and he** (*autos*) – and not anybody else – **will be the Saviour**"

Jesus Barabbas sought to live up to his name by leading a terrorist campaign against the occupying power of Rome – if you like, he sought Israel’s political salvation.

Now there is a place for politics and for political solutions – would that there were more committed Christians engaged in the political process.

But politics has only so much to offer – it can provide things like education and welfare, but it cannot deal with that rottenness which is at the heart of human relationships, which the Bible calls sin.

Jesus, and Jesus alone, can deal with our sin.

Jesus alone can deal with that spiritual cancer which destroys our relationship with God and with one another, and ultimately which threatens to destroy us too.

Jesus alone can offer us forgiveness – he alone can give us purpose in this life and hope for the next.

Jesus is the Saviour.

If I am honest, I doubt whether at the time Joseph understood the true significance of the name he gave to us son.

But he realised that this was no ordinary child – this was rather a child in whose birth God was at work in a strange and mysterious way.

The true significance of the name only became clear the other side of the Cross and resurrection. But nonetheless “**Joseph named**” his Son “**Jesus**” – the Saviour of the world.

I wonder whether there are any Josephs present here this evening?

You’ve come to church to sing the familiar carols – and in doing so you have sung of the coming of a Saviour, but frankly you have little clue as to what the word ‘Saviour’ really means.

You realise that this child whose birth we celebrate was no ordinary child – that in some strange way God was at work in his life and maybe his death too.

But precisely how God was at work, and what possible relevance that might have to you, you really are as mixed up as no doubt Joseph was when the angel appeared to him.

If that is you, then let me encourage you to join our next Alpha course which begins in a month’s time on Monday evening 24 January – I’ll be there, Leesa will be there, and so too will Matt.

Over the succeeding ten weeks we will explore with you the true significance of Jesus.

- Who was Jesus?
- What did he die?
- What possible relevance does his rising from the dead have for you and me?

These and other questions we will look at in very unpressurised way. Yes, come along to Alpha, and find out what the angel meant when he told Joseph to name his son ‘Jesus’.