

The Genealogy of Jesus and Why It Matters

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Hello, friends of Deacon Larry Oney with Hope and Purpose Ministries here in New Orleans, Louisiana. It's my prayer today for you as we draw closer to the celebration of the coming of Christ into the world, to the womb of the Virgin, Mary, the Theotokos, the mother got that you'd be found waiting in joyful hope.

You and I live in a world with many modern conveniences that in some ways, make things a lot more comfortable and easier for us, but in many ways, our world and space in which we live generates many silos of worry, anxiety, and fear that we all have to cope with. No matter how much money you have or how little you have and whatever your station is in life, there's no escape from the pressure, worry and temptations of life that we all have to face. Even Jesus, the son of the living God was birthed into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, to a young unwed mother who was betrothed to a poor blue-collar worker, a carpenter, named Joseph, no disrespect given to the great carpenters of the world.

I believe that God sent an angel to Mary during that time to encourage her because she was so young, but likely old enough to understand that an unwed mother found to be pregnant before the final stage of her marriage was subject to the harsh and unfair and potentially deadly first century Palestinian law of her day. So, God sent his emissary an angel by the name of Gabriel to comfort her and he says to Mary, what all long to hear when troubles come our way, he says to Mary, "Do not be afraid."

Sometimes people say what's in a name is not important. If names were not important, God would not have taken a time to give a divine instruction to the angel Gabriel to pass onto Mary. And doing so, God broke a common Jewish custom when it came to the name of the Savior of the world, Jesus, His name and birth record, His genealogy and your name and genealogy are important to God. Jesus' custom of the day indicated that when the first male child is born, the honor to name the child is given to the father. But in the incident at hand, the angel Gabriel gives very specific instructions against the custom. He says to Mary, you shall name him Jesus. And that He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.

It all started with Abraham to get to the point of the birth of Jesus. Jesus did not disappear and neither did we, Jesus's birth and coming to the world was planned from the beginning and so was yours and mine. With Jesus's family, starting with Abraham who had a son named Isaac, who had a son named Jacob and Jacob had a son named Jude and Jude had a son named Perez and Perez had a son named Hezron down to the generation where a man named Matthan had a son named Jacob and Jacob had a son named Joseph. Joseph was betrothed to a girl named Mary who was found with the child and his name was to be called Jesus. Obviously, God is interested in our names and He's interested in our genealogies.

I remember my first trip to the continent of Africa, about six or seven years ago. I landed in Rwanda, which is in East Africa for the first time in my life being on the continent of Africa. I'm a descendant of slaves and the dysphoria from Africa. So, I was disconnected with my homeland

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and disoriented about my sense of my genealogy or my family. When I landed in Rwanda, I began to weep and to cry on that plane because I was making my first recalling and continental reconnection with my own sense of self in my ancestors. I can't explain to you how overwhelming that was to me. I've since learned that I'm actually from West Africa in the country of Ghana. And I look forward to going there sometime soon to reconnect with my sense of being in place.

So, we can see that the significant of "what's in a name" is made manifest by the writer of the gospel, according to Luke and the attention that he gives to the genealogy of Jesus. Our name helps us recall our identity and connect us with our destiny. Jesus took no shortcuts in His life and He had to grow in wisdom and stature. Mary and Joseph had to teach Jesus, just like we have to teach our children. Mary was young, poor, and was not from the right part of town. It was said of her son, can any good thing come from Nazareth? But see where God is not where or how you start, is how and where you finish. I think we could all agree that Jesus is a son of Mary. The son of Joseph had a wonderful finish despite His start in a humble stable.

If you are from a small town, perhaps an unimpressive town or a village don't despair, God can still find you and use you to accomplish great things through you. If you're born out of wedlock or adopted or born prematurely or born into a broken family, God can still use you because with God, your history does not determine your destiny. At the appointed time, God will call you forward for His service and launch you into your divine mission upon the earth. He will give you the will and the ability to do what He desires you to do and what He's called you to do. And if you are willing, humble, and available, God will use you the same way He did with His own son. God protected Jesus by letting Him be safely born in a stable. And He protected Him from the hands of a murderer named Herod.

At the appropriate time, God sent His son Jesus down to the east bank of the Jordan River to be baptized by His cousin, John the Baptist. There's another genealogical connection there, there at the Jordan River, John the Baptizer calls out another name of Jesus. The scripture says this, the next day he, that is John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold," here comes a new name now, this is what John said, "Behold, the lamb of God." So far, Jesus has been given three names. He's been called Jesus the Savior, He's been called the Son of the Most High, and He's been called the Lamb of God by his cousin, John the Baptist.

So, there must be something in a name. After Jesus's baptism, God, the Father give Jesus yet another name. He says you are my Beloved Son. So, Jesus has been given a name by Mary. And that name is Jesus. He has been called by Gabriel, the Son of the Most High, He's been called by John the Baptist, the Lamb of God, and He's been called by God, the Father, the Beloved Son.

So, there must be something about a name. Despite the fact that even God, the Father has affirmed that Jesus is the Beloved Son, John, the Baptist has affirmed that He was the Lamb of God, and Gabriel has made plain that He is the Son of the Most High, despite all of that, the enemy in the desert tries to attack Jesus' identity saying in the desert, if you are the Son of God, turn the stones to bread. The enemy always attacks us when we are physically compromised. It's never a good idea to make a decision when you're hungry or tired. Again, in the scripture, we see

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the devil saying, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, trying to tempt Jesus, to tempt God. The devil knows that if he can distort our identity, he can affect our destiny.

You might be in need as you're preparing and participating in this retreat. Here's some good news for you and for me, Jesus has another name to help you, it is Jehovah-Jireh, which means "my provider." You might need healing today in your mind, your body, your soul, or even in your spirit right now. The good news is that his name is Jehovah-Rapha, which means "the God who heals." Maybe you're in a situation and you need God's covering. His name is Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord, "my banner, or my covering." Some scholars disagree on how many name God has in the scripture, because some argue that some names could be lumped together into one heading or a label.

Let's go with another name for God. God has a lot of names in the scripture. Our God is omnipotent, He's omniscient and omnipresent. So, He is all in all. He's infinite, eternal and all powerful and all knowing. There's a beautiful song that attempts to capture the essence of who God is. Even though our finite minds can't fathom who God really is. I think the Lord smiles when we try to grasp a sense of the weight of His personhood, He knows that we can't get it but even named some small part we can't get. There's a song by Chris Tomlin that tries to capture the essence of who God is. The lyrics of the song says that God is indescribable, uncontainable, you placed the stars in the sky, and you know them by name, you are amazing God, all powerful. Uncontainable. All struck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim you are amazing.

We see an example of the loftiness of God. When we find out being strived to approach a Holy God and determine who He is. And the book of Exodus Moses asked the Lord, when I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of our fathers has sent me to you, if they ask me, "What is his name?" What am I to tell them? God replied, "I am who am " Then He added, this is what you should tell the Israelites. " I am sent me to you." God spoke further to Moses saying to the Israelites, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has sent me to you. He starts to give His genealogy to connect himself with the ones he wants to know Him. This is my name forever. This is my title for all generations. God says wow. Can you imagine having somebody ask you your name? And you say that your name is, "I am". Only God can claim that name. I am because He is.

Finally when they went to get Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked them, "who were they looking for?" They said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.'" And Jesus said the same thing that he told Moses to tell his brothers in the Old Testament. He said, " I am." Of course, when Jesus said, " I am," they all fell down to the ground because power came out of His being and out of His mouth.

What can one say after that? And Jesus' name is, " I am who I am. " Jesus is everything. He is our every provision. If somebody is hungry today, the Lord says that He is the bread of life. If you're in darkness today, He is a light in the darkness. If your world is shaky right now, the Lord says He is the cornerstone. If any of us have sinned against God today, He says that He is our advocate before the Father. If today you need a warrior, Jesus says that He is the lion of Judah. If you're feeling weak right now, perhaps, He is the mighty one for you and for me. If you feel like your life is shifting as like being on shifting sand, Jesus says that He is your rock. If anybody's feeling lost right now, Jesus says, "I am the way." If you don't know what to believe right now,

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Jesus says, "I am the truth." If you're shaky about what lifestyle is best for you, Jesus says He is the life.

This Jesus is the morning glory. He's the lily of the Valley. He's the bright and shining star. And for us who believe in Him and also for those that are calling out to Him during this advent season, for those who might be in need during this advent all over the world, no matter where you are, no matter where you were born, no matter what color you are, no matter your history, this Jesus is wonderful Counselor, Mighty Father, Prince of Peace, and in a real way, at this moment in the world, we need to know that He is Emmanuel, which means, God is with us. With this eternal truth before you and me, may we always live in hope during this advent and walk with purpose. God bless you.