

4th Sunday of Advent, 22.12.19

Matthew 2. 18-25:

NAMES OF OUR SAVIOUR - *Kay Morison*.

Our Advent Calendar came this year, in small, neat Box! It came by post from our daughter. Not your ordinary large piece of card with daily doors to open.

No, this was more like a pack of cards. In the box there were actually 24 cards, numbered one to twenty four. Also, in the box, I found a l-o-n-g piece of string and a dinky small bag with tiny cute little pegs.

The instructions told me to fit the string between two strong holding places... Then I was to clip on each card, numbered 1-24 in the right order, with the numbers facing me.

I followed those instructions. It entailed some maneuvering of furniture and getting a bit dizzy myself BUT it looked very colourful.

All that for what purpose? The instructions told me **to turn over** and re-peg one card per day.

And what was revealed on turning each card??

It was not the old traditional picture of some aspect of the Nativity story. NO, each card had a Name given to Jesus in the Bible so perhaps TITLE as well as Name, is maybe a more accurate description. **So, from our second reading today - My first short point is:**

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PERSON'S NAME:

You KNOW your name matters!

In the N.T. reading from Mathew's Gospel today, we were told two of our Lord's names. One is, of course **Jesus** and the other **Immanuel**. That name - "Immanuel" was revealed when I turned over the Advent card for Dec. 8th. I had a further peek and of course and logically Dec. 24th's card is - **JESUS!**

Matthew tells us that Joseph was told these two names by an Angel - a Messenger from God who spoke to him in a dream.

And each of those two very special names has a meaning. Does your name have a meaning? Do you know what it is?

Our grandchildren in S. Africa each have an African name as well as English ones. The oldest also has the name of John's Father and the younger boy, the name of my Father. Sean's African name means: "Peace Bringer".....and Mark's: "We have been given a Gift"

Maybe here in the UK we miss out on names which mean something unique and special to the parents and wider family. John and I attended a church in Harare in Zimbabwe where the Rector of their parish was called Innocent and his curate called Gift.

I asked what those names would mean:

Innocent clearly applies to every new born child.

To most parents a new baby is a Gift

So in many parts of the world - maybe not in the UK -but certainly, in other countries, names have a deep, significant and symbolic meaning.

So those two names to be given to Jesus tell us a great deal about who he is and what his life's work will be. The Bible passage we heard just now says that the name **Jesus** means he *"Saves His people from their sins"*.

The other name Joseph was told to give to Jesus was *"Immanuel"*, Immanuel means "God **with** Us!" This looks right back to a prophecy from the O.T. book of Isaiah. And it's a warm encouragement to each of us to have "God with us" as our personal friend! As I said at the beginning, this was the Name emphasized on Day 8 of our Advent Card Pack.

Now, Joseph was told to give these two names to the baby Mary was expecting. Jesus and Immanuel. However, long before any naming of a real baby took place, Joseph first had a huge ethical problem to resolve. You and I have a pretty vast new concept to grasp: So secondly, we need to get a firm hold on:

The Meaning of Marriage Customs in N.T. times.

This is very different territory from us today in the UK. We've already looked at how names can have a deep meaning.

Now we need to discover how marriage for Joseph and Mary was so very different from marriages today. That's even though "Marriage" and the customs attached to the status, have changed so much in our own life time.

Professor William Barclay in his commentary on this passage says "to our Western ways of thinking, the relationships in this passage are very bewildering..." He explains:

Firstly there was an **Engagement**, often made by the parents, when the couple to be married were still only children.

Secondly there was the **Betrothal**. This ratified the original and long ago Engagement and lasted a year. It was absolutely binding. The couple were known as man and wife but they did not have the rights of a man and wife. This betrothal could only be terminated by **divorce**. (again a word with a different meaning today, for we use it nowadays to apply to *married* couples) So, back in Bible times, if a girl's betrothed man died during this year, she was then known as a *"virgin who is a widow."*

Mary and Joseph were at this stage of betrothal when their lives were turned upside down. For when Joseph discovers Mary his "wife", was going to have a child, (though she was still someone with whom he did not actually **live**), The poor man was faced with a dire ethical situation. Family disgrace was imminent! Scandal loomed!

However, Joseph could divorce Mary, and as v.19 says, he was planning to do this *"quietly"*. In that way there would be an end to local gossip and speculation. That way, much scandal, accusatory looks and remarks, cruel gossip which could have been applied to both of them, was avoided.

We must remember that Nazareth was a small village and any scandal would be at a premium!

STORY In our last parish, we lived in a village. Actually a suburb of Derby but it liked to be called a "village". What was said at the top of the hill would be well known by the folk at the bottom of the hill before the end of the day! In fact, even before you could walk down the hill, the news would have proceeded you!

But back in Nazareth, as Matthew tells us, just while Joseph was wondering what to do about this dire ethical situation he found himself in, he had a vivid dream.

Again, with our Western mind set, we need to remember that dreams were - and still are - far more significant in other cultures than in ours. For example, when John was training clergy and supervising Ordinands in southern Africa, several of them told him they had been called to the ordained ministry precisely because of a vivid dream they had had.

And the result of the dream Joseph had, brings me to my third point.

The true Meaning of Obedience.

To do what God tells you to do!

How did that apply to Joseph?

Well, by the time he had woken up from his dream, Joseph was ready to do what God had told him to do! He was obedient.

Joseph accepted Mary into his home and his life. Though again, as Matthew tells us, *"he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son"*.

And the final few words of the passage we heard read to us today were when Jesus was finally born....and....

"Joseph gave him, the baby, the name Jesus"

When you think about it, now you know...Obedience.

For we see Joseph being obedient first of all, by taking Mary into his home - and secondly, by obeying what he had heard in his dream about the special name for this baby.

The question inevitably arises: Are we as obedient as Joseph in **our** Christian lives? – actually acting on and obeying little

promptings we may have to visit someone, to call, to email or to give a gift.

For those two names that Joseph obediently gave the new baby, give us a challenge to obedience right here and now!

Jesus means **Saviour**. Can you say, hand on heart with no reservations say that Jesus is YOUR Saviour? That you are trusting in Him and not your own good works and abilities, to provide your place in Heaven. God loves our good works, but He wants us to love His Son even more! We can't "earn" our way into the Kingdom. Jesus is the Key. HE is the Saviour!

So have you asked him? To be YOUR Saviour?

And don't forget that there is a second name belonging to Jesus: Immanuel, "God is with us"

Now, Matthew was writing for Jewish hearers. They would know the Old Testament origin of both those names for Lord and Master.

But today it's almost two thousand and twenty, not Bible times any more.

STORY: Just a couple of days ago, while I was out doing some essential shopping in the pouring rain, my husband John was back in our flat, giving this sermon a "once over": (He always checks to make sure the words flow clearly). In the midst of his editorial work, the Block's outside doorbell rang loudly.

On going to the door, John found a "drowned rat" of a young guy wanting to deliver a parcel to one of our flats. The young man evidently hailed from one of the Eastern European countries and had very little, if any, English. He

looked not only soaked, but lost. However, my John saw from the package that the delivery was for one of our top flats and took him in the dry up in the lift, to show him the right door to post the package through.

As the lad turned back from doing his delivery, John for the first time, saw his name Badge.....It was printed in large capitals: "IMANUEL".

John had just been reading what I had written in this sermon about this very special name, so he took hold of the badge, and said excitedly "Immanuel!! At the same time he pointed up to towards heaven and then down to both the delivery guy and himself, to imply that God is with us!

At that the chap looked up with a huge smile, and said: "My father and mother (pointing to himself) - **Christians!**" From his joyful face it was abundantly clear that he was a believer too. John KNEW, so did the delivery guy -

So can you ask yourselves today the vital question: Is Jesus my friend and Saviour? And if not, invite Him into your life?

And if you **Know** Jesus, but are not very often conscious of His presence, can you grasp the wonderful truth that He is with you 100% of the time! He's called the "Friend who sticks closer to you than a Brother". (Closer than your smart-phone!).

Come what may, Jesus is God with Us. We'll need Him in the uncertain days which lie ahead!

Put your hand in His as we venture into the New Year together!

AND:

Hang on to His names:

Jesus - my Saviour!

Emmanuel - God WITH me!