

Minister's Message – December 2012

What's In a Name?

New Zealand is famous (or infamous) for various things. Unlike most other countries it has a law banning certain names parents want to give their children, a 'weird children's names' law. Apparently 'Lucifer' is a popular choice but is not allowed. 'Number 16 Bus Shelter' was another name refused registration. If India had such a law we might not have had a student called Hitler and another called Ben Hur.

We may not see names and their meaning as significant, but in some societies such things are very important. In the Bible names are significant. We read of names being changed when a person's status is changed by the Lord e.g. Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel.

We also read of different names and titles being given to Jesus who was born to Mary with her husband Joseph. Jesus was in fact named by an angel of the Lord – such was the importance of his name. Mary would never have chosen the amazing names given to her son before he was born or even conceived. She had little idea of how important her son would be to the human race.

The angel told Mary 'you shall call his name Jesus' (Luke 1:31). An angel told Joseph the same name saying 'because he will save his people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21). Jesus, like Joshua, means 'one who saves'. While this name is not unique to Mary's son, the fact that he will save his people from their sins is unique. When the title 'Christ' (Messiah) is added (Matthew 1:1, 18) his name is unique. He is the anointed (Christ) saviour (Jesus) of God.

Immanuel is another name mentioned to Joseph by the angel. This name actually comes from the Bible and means 'God with us' (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23). It was not a man or woman but an angel that applied this name to the child in Mary's womb. The eternal, almighty, creator God was coming to live among human beings on this earth.

Mary was really surprised at the other names by which the angel referred to her yet-to-be-conceived son. 'He will be called the Son of God' (Luke 1:35). What mother would not be astounded at such a presumptuous name – 'Son of God'? It would not be allowed in New Zealand! Not even the proudest of mentally stable parents would give their child such a name.

This is what we read in the Bible. It is amazing but true. It is incredible but true. 'Jesus Christ' the 'Son of God'. Mary didn't know what to think, but she accepted what she heard from the angel of the Lord. She must have pondered these words as she saw her son grow up and do mighty works, healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead.

Mary must have pondered these words as she saw her son suffer and die on the cross, be buried, and then be resurrected from the dead. She would come to believe in the truth and significance of these names given to her son. She came to believe that his name was above every name and that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:10, 11).

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