

THE NAME OF JESUS

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21.

How blessed it is to open the New Testament and find its beginning after this fashion! His name and His mission were announced by the angel of the Lord who appeared to Joseph, the husband-to-be of Mary. No greater message was ever proclaimed in the ears of men and no more wonderful declaration was ever made. The angel was telling why the Lord Jesus was coming into the world, namely, to save people from their sins.

When the archangel Gabriel announced the birth of Christ Jesus to His virgin-mother, the message from heaven ran thus: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:30-31). When, at a later date, Mary was espoused to Joseph, and, as Matthew tells us, "was found with child of the Holy Ghost," so that her husband "was minded to put her away privily," to him too the angel of the Lord appeared, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."

Here was a Child Who was divinely named. He was named from heaven. Mary did not have to ask Joseph, nor Joseph, Mary. Neither did either of them have to ask anybody else. It had been divinely decreed what His name should be. It was to be a name that nobody could counterfeit. "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The name "Jesus" is the dome of all vocal grandeur and the peroration of all splendid language. The prattling child does not have to hear that name many times before it ventures to speak it. For that name fits the tongue of the baby learning to talk as well as the tongue of the orator to whom people listen like slaves to an emancipation proclamation. From the tongues of mothers singing lullabies to their children and from the tongues of choirs with tenor triumphs and soprano superlatives and alto excellence and bass blessedness of song that name falls with ease. And when old age, sometimes beset with incessant woes, draws nigh to the sunset gates with voice that speaks feebly, tremblingly and indistinctly, still the name "Jesus" is the weightiest and sweetest word when they sing:

"Jesus, I love Thy charming name,
'Tis music to my ear;
Fain would I sound it out so loud
That heaven and earth might hear."

We associate names with the persons who have them. A man's name is not like a mantle, but a perfectly fitting garment. Repulsive as serpents in kindergartens are some names. Hideous as crocodiles in garden pools are some names. Raucous as fussy crows and singing nightingales is the mention and remembrance of some names, when we speak them.

Mention Jezebel! You think of one whose life was terrible, whose death was horrible. Mention Athaliah! You think of a woman who was bold and bad, who broke people on the wheel of her unflinching will. Mention Delilah! You think of one in whose heart was the viperous treachery which led Samson to blindness, bonds and death. Mention Cleopatra! You think of the beautiful adder coiled upon the throne of the Ptolemies who made a wreck of Antony. Mention Madame de Pompadour! You think of the infamous favorite of the court of Louis XV, a woman whose shameless prodigality makes the cheeks of decency burn. Mention Aspasia! You think of the immoral woman who counted Socrates and Pericles among her long list of lovers. Mention Nero! Your heart has a sudden revolt against

his beastly brutality. Mention Absalom! You think of a young man physically without blemish, a wolf in sheep's clothes, whose face hid the soul of a devil. Mention Napoleon! You think of him, "the archangel of war," who hurled an avalanche of armies over Europe, who died "a chained Prometheus, the world exultant at his fall." Mention Judas! You think of the pitiful wretch who betrayed deity, disgraced humanity and destroyed himself.

Many are the names we never like to hear. Mere mention of the names of some men and women would cause angels to shudder to the tips of their wings. But there are names attractive and sweet to us. While there are persons whose names make you think of vinegar, because they are sour of nature and snappish of tongue, still there are names that are like fragrance to our nostrils, music to our ears, honey to our palates, velvet to our touch and beauty to our eyes.

Say "Jesus"! You think of Bethlehem where heaven put out its brightest star to mark His birthplace, where a babe, ages older than His mother, bent the date lines of all the nations around His manger cradle. Say "Jesus"! You think of Cana of Galilee where, at a wedding "the unconscious water saw its God and blushed." Say "Jesus"! And you think of Nazareth, with His voluntary poverty, lowly associations, His subjection to Mary and Joseph, though heaven and earth gave instant submission to His commands. Say "Jesus"! You think of the Sea of Galilee where you hear the neighing of a great storm as it comes on with great strides. Say "Jesus"! You think of Bethany where, at the tomb of Lazarus, the tears of humanity streamed from His eyes and the voice of divinity issued from His lips, and awoke the dead to life.

Say "Jesus"! You see the face more marred than any man's, a face whose cheeks He gave to them who plucked out the hair. Say "Jesus"! You hear the voice that had in it the gentleness of the zephyr and the force of the cyclone. Say "Jesus"! You somehow feel the tender touch of Him Who touched lepers into cleanness, blind eyes into seeing, dumb tongues into singing, deaf ears into hearing, withered hands into wholeness and crippled feet into nimbleness.

Say "Jesus"! You think of that lonely man Who never took a step, or lifted a finger or breathed a word, to injure anyone, but Who welcomed to His love the most neglected of the outcast, the poorest of the poor, the dullest of the dull, the vilest of the vile, the saddest of the sad, making His name aromatic with all odors and accordant with all harmonies.

The most familiar name of the second person of the Trinity is Jesus. It is the name many of us learned at our mother's knee, and is one which has always been a tower of strength and an unending source of comfort to any and all who have come to know and to love the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Jesus," oh, how sweet the name!
"Jesus," ev'ry day the same;
"Jesus," let all saints proclaim
Its worthy praise forever.

The blessed name of Jesus is mighty unto the pulling down of the strongholds of sin. It is easy to remember. It is sweet and powerful music to the ear of the trusting believer. It contains in its euphony the sweetest story ever told, the most glorious news ever proclaimed, and the mightiest message of hope ever given. It is the foundation of our religion, the sum and substance of our preaching, and the guiding light for a world lost in the darkness of sin. It inspires the living, cheers the sorrowful, sustains the burdened and comforts the dying. It begins our salvation, provides our sanctification and insures our glorification.

No single world grips the hearts of men like the name of "Jesus." History is plowed right and left with the deep furrows of His deathless influence. Imagine what it would be

like in this world if suddenly the name of Jesus were to be torn from us and, with it, everything for which it stands. Life is hard enough as it is. It would be intolerable without the light of Jesus. Therefore, the grateful heart must exclaim with Newton:

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ears;
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fears."

Such music is ours because one quiet day, long ago, an angel said to devout Joseph: "Take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Let us think of our Lord as He appears in the light of these gentle words which fell that memorable day upon Joseph's hearing.

I. The Title He Bears.

"Thou shalt call his name Jesus." What is thus suggested is that Mary's Son, Who came by human birth, was nevertheless the gift of heaven, the putting forth of God, in a sense which can never be claimed for any other person. It is this fact, and this alone, that gives the name "Jesus" the divine overtones which it so richly carries.

In that name is the overtone of sinlessness. Quietly, unflinchingly, He challenged His critics: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46). Peter was in a position to speak with authority and full candor when he said of Jesus: He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (I Peter 2:21). Robert Speer wrote, "Christ's life bore no scars. There were no memories of past failures or mistakes. He came to each of the choices and tests of life bearing no handicap from the past." So the name He bears rings with the music of His flawless holiness.

In that name is the overtone of masterfulness. Winds obeyed Him. The sea was calmed by Him. Demons fled before Him. Disease withered under His touch. Sins were forgiven at His word. Death was conquered by His power. A world conquest was boldly announced as His purpose: "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations."

In that name is the overtone of humanness. Again and again He spoke of Himself as "the Son of Man." Through the mysterious door of human childbirth He came among us. By tasting our griefs, feeling our hungers, sharing our sweat and toil, He identified Himself with us as "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."

He took this real but sinless humanity of His and, by constant reliance upon the Holy Spirit, demonstrated how glorious man's life can be when it is conformed to the will of God.

"Call His name Jesus"! The angel bade them do it. They did it. And now, after nineteen centuries, the overtones of the title are heard everywhere. Sinlessness, masterfulness and humanness--these are combined in Jesus as they never have been united in any other figure. They give us earth's sweetest and purest music.

II. The Task He Performs.

"He shall save his people from their sins." Dean Shirley Jackson Case once suggested that the religions of the world could be divided into those of achievement and those of rescue. In a religion of rescue you begin with an acknowledgment of a man's sinful failure and his inability to recover and redeem himself. God must extend a hand or he will sink into the abyss. Christianity is a religion of rescue. Its message is primarily that of His redeeming graciousness. Men need someone to rescue them, Who can bring God's forgiveness to bear upon their soiled consciences and God's power to

bear upon their misdirected lives. Christ Jesus has the power to rescue men who are beaten at the business of living, to smash the shackles that bind them to a world of evil, and to lift them into a new and higher order of living in which they know themselves to be the sons of God. Joseph Parker once stood in City Temple in London and said, "Christ is the only man known in history who was born with specific and exclusive reference to the sins of the human family....I thank all men who have done anything for me, but there is a fire in me that is burning up my life--who is to put that out? There is an asp biting at my soul, and I am dying of its injected poison. Who can touch a mind diseased? This Son of Mary, Son of God, comes with the avowed purpose of doing this very thing I want to have done." To this task of being man's Saviour Jesus Christ is forever committed. Has He saved you?

III. The Trust He Deserves.

We must give Him the trust which is His due. Belief is confidence in a proposition for which the mind has found evidence. Trust is commitment to a person who may reasonably be entitled to our confidence. It is this trust that goes beyond belief, and links us, vitally and victoriously, to Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

Often the Word "believe" in the New Testament is so used as to include both of these elements of faith--the consent of the mind to a truth and the commitment of one's self to a person. You have it well illustrated in the fourth chapter of John. The Samaritan woman, after her revolutionary contact with Jesus at the well, went into the city and pleaded: "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

O soul, broken in whatever way you may be, burdened in whatever fashion, bowed under whatever load, bound by whatever fetters, give yourself in penitent trust to this Bethlehem-born Jesus. Test Him for yourself. He will demonstrate His ability to save you, to lift the burden of your guilt, to soothe the soreness of your weary feet, to kindle a song in your drab, discordant soul, and to send you away singing:

"None other Lamb, none other Name,
None other hope in heaven or earth or sea,
None other hiding place from guilt and shame,
None beside Thee."