

Message Series: **'ReDiscovering Christmas: 6 Unlikely Stories and Yours'**

Message Title: **'The Meaning of the Christmas Story'**

Scripture Source: **Matthew 1:18-25**

Date: Sunday, December 20, 2015

Teacher: John Garner

---

### **A Tourist and a Rembrandt**

A tourist writes about the beauty and frustration of a fleeting moment with a priceless artistic masterpiece, 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'. His honest and insightful words deeply moved and informed me.

"In the Hermitage we paused momentarily in front of Rembrandt's masterpiece 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'...The painting is...emotionally gripping and morally complex. But on this tour, we talked about none of its meanings. The guide did not tell the story. There was no time to really pause before the passion...It left no mark...you may end up skimming over life and nothing is deep enough to leave a mark." (David Brooks article in The New York Style Magazine Nov.'15)

These confessional words touched me, even jarred me and made me think about the Christmas story...do we 'talk of its meaning' and 'tell the story' clearly and accurately? Do we give time to 'pause before the passion' revealed in the story of the birth of Jesus? Do we understand the meaning of his given name, Jesus? Do we understand our place in this sacred story? Does the Christmas story leave a 'deep mark' in our soul and mind...a 'mark' of insight, hope, faith, resolve, and love?

### **Let's Get Acquainted: An Unlikely Couple: Matthew 1:18-19**

Integral to the Christmas story are a young woman and man. Ordinary people, yet distinguished by their love for God, their humility and readiness to take God's jarring and bewildering words of promise and instruction to heart and act decisively.

First Mary: Luke 1:38 – *"I am the Lord's servant", Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."*

Now Joseph: Matthew 1:24-25 – *"...he did what the angel of the Lord commanded him... And he gave him the name Jesus."*

### **What's In a Name? : Matthew 1:21-23**

We often give our child a name that has meaning to us. It could be to honour someone, either living or passed on. It could be that a certain name has a meaning that we hope our child will grow into. Rarely do we give names thoughtlessly or carelessly. Although, some names seem to be way out there! Illustrate: John, 'gift of God', the name given to me when adopted.

God's angel gave Joseph specific instruction, during a dream, regarding the naming of the 'miracle baby.' No need to pour over baby name books or conduct an on-line poll looking for ideas!

*"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* Matthew 1:21

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means 'the LORD saves.'

His name speaks of his earthly mission and singular purpose...to offer salvation from sin.

This naming was predicted. Isaiah 7:14. Note that this Saviour would enter our world and draw near to us with this incredible offer of salvation...Immanuel, which means, 'God with us.'

### **Our Greatest Need, God's Greatest Provision: Matthew 1:21**

At the heart of the Christmas story is an uncomfortable fact and a gracious offer of God. The fact is that each of us has been 'born with a bent to badness'. We are born with an instinct to do our own thing and fail to love...God, others and ourselves. Please note, the fact that we are sinners doesn't mean we are worthless people. We...you and me are created in God's image. We have profound worth in God's eyes. Yet, this problem of sin must be addressed and dealt with.

Ponder what I am saying for a moment. I believe that if we are honest with ourselves, God's statement rings true, uncomfortably so. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Romans 3:23. We fail to love God supremely, others sacrificially and ourselves wisely. Yet, at this hard point of inescapable truth, the story of Christmas radiates hope and help for people like you and me.

We are not abandoned by God. The Father sent his Son to be our Saviour. Your Saviour. He has entered our broken, aching, lamenting world and offered salvation from sin in deeply personal ways.

### **Pause before the Prospect and Offer of God's Salvation**

We can experience salvation from the penalty, power and ultimately, one day, the presence of sin.

**# 1: Salvation from the penalty of sin.** Romans 6:23. God, who is holy, perfectly righteous and just must punish sin. The penalty is death...physical and spiritual, separation from God and all that is good and loving. Yet, God offers forgiveness of sins on the basis of the sacrificial death of Jesus on our behalf.

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* | John 1:9

God yearns to be in relationship with each of us and through faith in Jesus we can be restored to relationship with our Creator. We can be free from the burden of condemnation and free to engage with God.

**# 2: Salvation from the power of sin.** We can become more loving, wise, righteous people, learning to experience God's power to resist walking down dark and destructive paths of misguided attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Romans 8:9-11. The power to resist 'walks on the dark side' and the power to mature emotionally, spiritually and relationally. We can be free of a gnawing sense of futility. Through daily faith and obedience to God's Word we can experience more fully His transforming power.

**# 3: One day, when Christ returns we will be finally and completely saved from the presence of sin and its ugly effects.** Believers in Christ will inhabit a new heaven and earth where righteousness and love reign and are experienced. We can be free from a sense of hopelessness and live with a sense of rock solid anticipation of God's ultimate triumph and healing and restoring work. We can be in on that!

### **Mary, Joseph and You**

Their story teaches us to trust God and his character, even when bewildered and uncertain. This is not a blind or unthinking faith; it is an intelligent trust that believes in the credibility of God's character and Word. Please, feel free to ask questions and voice doubts.

### **Back to Rembrandt for a Moment**

Do you see yourself in the picture? Needing a fresh experience of God's love and forgiveness? The Christmas story is rich in meaning and it's wrapped up in the name, Jesus. Will you accept the offer of salvation so freely made, to you? And if a follower of Jesus, will you seek to live more fully in the power of Christ's salvation?

Let this story 'mark' your soul and mind deeply, in life giving and life directing ways, today.

### **Response**

- Salvation from the penalty of sin
- Salvation from the power of sin
- Salvation from the presence of sin