

Introduction: Pg. _____

Merry Christmas!

Introduce. Welcome all. Highlight guests (RHC App & Connect Card You Received when you Walked in).

Christmas is almost here (Kids are you excited about Christmas?!). Christmas is almost here, and every year we get reintroduced to many of the glorious and notorious names of the season. Maybe you recognize names like...

The Names of Christmas.

- Clark Griswold, who took his family on a special vacation. And Ralphie, who wanted a Red Ryder 200 Action Air Rifle and whose friend Flick got his tongue stuck to a pole after a “triple-dog dare.”
- Then there’s the transformed George Bailey and the mischievously generous Kevin McAllister...
- Let’s not forget Buddy the Elf and the Grinch who Stole Christmas.

The Names of 2021

The same is true as we look back on 2021. We started the year with the poetic prowess of Amanda Gorman. This summer we witnessed the courage of Simone Biles raising awareness around mental health. This fall we saw the achievements of the interplanetary dreamer, Elon Musk. And the hopes of Boston sports fanatics have rested on names like Kike Hernandez, Mac Jones, & Ime Udoka.

There is so much wrapped up in a name. Names identify us. Names represent what we’re about. A name can tell us a lot about a person’s story.

My wife, Marsha, and I love telling the story of our children’s names.

Picture of the Turley Family

When God had the opportunity to name his one and only Son, he chose the perfect name. His name would perfectly capture his identity and mission. We find the story of his name in Matthew 1:18-25...

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Matthew 1:18-25 (text displayed)

What is the name of God’s Son?

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“His Name is Jesus!”

Matthew 1:18-25

Story

Whether you are hearing the story of Jesus for the first time or the thousandth time, I hope you will consider the magnitude of what is happening here.

Joseph and Mary were betrothed. That’s basically engagement on steroids. Betrothal was a legally binding pledge to be married that could only be broken by a certificate of divorce.

Everything in Mary and Joseph’s betrothal was great... until it wasn’t .

Joseph received news that Mary become pregnant, “before they came together.” Most of you are old enough to understand what that means. :) which means, our guy Joseph would have been absolutely perplexed and distraught. His world came crashing down, as the only explanation for Mary’s pregnancy was unfaithfulness.

What was he going to do? Verse 19: “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”

But God intervened in verse 20 through an angelic messenger... Read 20.

The virgin birth of Jesus is a mend-bending, miraculous truth. Perhaps, one of the most remarkable features of Matthew’s account is just how unremarkable it reads.

But now verse 21.

“You shall call his name Jesus.” This was the same message Mary received, as captured in the Gospel of Luke 1:31: “You shall call his name Jesus.”

The name angels gave Joseph & Mary to name their child was the Hebrew name, *Yeshua*. In 1st century Israel, even more than today, parents chose names that expressed their greatest hopes and prayers for their children.

Now, you may be surprised to hear that *Yeshua* was actually a common name... 1) because many children were named after the great leader Joshua, or *Yeshua*, who took Israel into the Promised Land, but more importantly... 2) *Yeshua* or...

“Jesus” means “God saves!” or “God rescues!”

This was their greatest hope! One day, God would bring salvation, deliverance and rescue!

But... there is something distinctly different about *this child* receiving *this name*! It’s one thing to say: “God saves!” It’s altogether different to say *this baby* would be *that* Savior!

T: I hope you’ll carefully consider the power of two truths revealed in his name, the name of Jesus!

1. Jesus rescues us from our rejection of God.

We see WHY Jesus will be called Jesus in verse 21: “For he will save his people from their sins.”

Most people think of sin as simply doing bad things. Sin is certainly not good. It is bad, but... the essence of sin is loving or choosing anything over God and his ways.

We all excel at this, and there is more than enough evidence to prove it.

Like a certain father, I know, who ate 5 out of the 7 incredible, mouth watering, taste bud celebrating CAKE POPS sent over by his neighbor, only for his children to discover the empty jar on the shelf... there is a Scrooge located deep in each of our souls, and none of us can hide the evidence.

This dark flower blooms in 1M ways as we all have rejected God’s love and God’s wisdom.

- We naturally look out for our own interests - rather than loving the people around us.
- We all carry the stains of greed, jealousy, and hypocrisy.
- In fact, every time we value anything (career or pleasures; relationships or possessions) more than we value God...

Each time adds to the insurmountable evidence that we need to be saved from our sins.

You say, "Why is that?" Because the consequence of our rejection is separation. (Spiritual consequences - death serving as the greatest and final consequence of our sin)

T: But here's the good news! God is not okay with that, he loves us too much!! Jesus came to rescue us from our rejection of God, and...

2. Jesus rescues us into a relationship with God.

Christmas reveals that God does not simply tolerate us. He does not put up with us because he has no other choice.

He actually wants to be WITH US - - in the same room, sitting at the same table. He wants to serve us, listen to us, understand our pain, and celebrate our joys!

I saw some Christmas signs for sale this week in a local coffee. They were in the shape of ornaments and had various messages you could hang on your front door. They ranged from "Merry Christmas" and "Baby its Cold Outside" to "Home is where your Dogs are" and the most catchy of all: (NOT "WELCOME!" BUT) "WELCOME-ISH." It had the parenthetical thought: (Depends who you are and how long you plan to stay)"

We laugh at that because we all feel that way at times, but SADLY it also represents how we often live.

- You are welcomed... if you look like me.
- You can stay... if you share the same political views.
- You can stay a really long time, if you promise to never hurt me and always take my side.

But not the love of Jesus. Jesus' love is not conditioned on our past failures, present action, or future performance.

The love of Christ is unconditional! He knows our story, down to every dark detail, and he opens his arms anyway, inviting us into a forever friendship!

This is the good news of Christmas!

Jesus came as Emmanuel - - "God WITH us." (Verses 22-23)

And when he came, he invited us a better way of life:

- The way of Jesus provides rest in a culture of constant hurry!
- The way of Jesus delivers peace for every anxiety.
- The way of Jesus will right the wrongs of every injustice.
- The way of Jesus delivers a joy that transcends our ever-changing circumstances.

But the question we should be asking is: how can we reconnect with Jesus and his way?

Here's how: the baby born in Bethlehem - God WITH US, became the man who would die FOR US on the cross. In spite of our separation, Jesus offers us rescue and salvation through his sacrifice! Don't miss the connection between Christmas and the crucifixion.

Most of you are familiar with the tragic story of Sgt. Johanny Rosario.

Picture: Sgt. Johanny Rosario

The Lawrence native was one of 13 US Marines killed on August 26th when suicide bombers and gunmen attacked the crowd of Afghan people at Kabul airport, as they tried to flee their country.

Johanny Rosario gave her life to protect the lives of others. She is a true hero, in every sense of the word: courageous, selfless, a servant of the people.

After her death, she was remembered with these words: "Marine Sergeant Johanny Rosario represented the very best our country has to offer. She made the ultimate sacrifice for our country protecting vulnerable Americans and Afghans trying to get to safety – a selfless and honorable mission." (Lori Trahan)

I tell her story, in part, to honor her sacrifice. I also tell her story to help us see that her sacrifice points to a sacrifice of far greater proportions.

T: 2,000 years ago, Jesus sacrificed his life for us. He died to show us just how much God loves us. He died, so that we might be rescued into a relationship with God.

Conclusion:

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:9-10)

My question for you is this: Have you received the benefits of his rescue mission? Do you know his love? Have you said "YES" to the what he has done for you in his life, death, and resurrection?

If you have, you know what Christmas is all about. You know life and love and peace and joy and a hope that will never disappoint us.

If not, don't wait. Jesus has wrapped a gift for you, but you may be waiting to open it until 2022 or 2025 or "oh, I'll get all that stuff figured out when I turn 30 or 40 or 60". Don't wait. This gift is too good! He loves you too much!

PRAYER – Connect Card.

"Jesus, I see what you've done for me. I receive the gift you offer me to rescue me from my rejection of you and into a relationship with you. Thank you for being God with us and God for us.

I need you. Forgive me of my sin. Help me to live my life for you."