

w Reflect on the life of Jesus. To what extent do we see the focus of his life on being the Saviour from sin?

### Celebrate!

The cross wasn't the end of him! He's alive! We hear him opening the minds of the disciples so they could understand the Scriptures – "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24.46-47).

So his mission was accomplished. Now his commission is for us, his people. At his birth the angel announced, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2.10-11).

He is now depending on human angels to get the message out into the world in each generation (the word "angel" simply means "messenger").

It's Christmas time, and that's time for a celebration! But as we celebrate Jesus, we are celebrating a life in which death wasn't the end but a new beginning for all who put their trust in him!

w Christmas – to what extent are we just celebrating the beautiful story of the birth of a baby a long long time ago? How can we communicate the significance of this birth without greater reference to his life, work, teachings, death and resurrection?

w "We are celebrating a life in which death wasn't the end but a new beginning for all who put their trust in him!" Jesus... Saviour... "He will save his people from their sins." What does this mean for us in the daily practice of the Christian life?



Four studies on Christmas by Peter J Blackburn

## 4. Jesus, Saviour

There are many reasons why a child is given a particular name. Sometimes a baby is named after a parent or grandparent. Some names have a long family tradition, though in Australia we don't seem to have "James Smith III," as seems the case in USA.

Sometimes a child is named after a film star or sporting hero. In one small Queensland country town, a new baby was named "Bart Andy." One of our church folk commented to the mother, "How lovely! Two bible names, Bartholomew and Andrew!" "Not at all," the baby's mother replied, "He's Bart after Bart Cummings and Andy after his father." Perhaps it is hoped the growing child will emulate their namesake.

Some names are garnered from a list in a book. Others are "made up" specially for this child – I always hope the child doesn't mind the name when he/she grows up!

w In English-speaking countries, there is one unique name that is never given to a child. He may be Christian or Christopher, but never "Jesus." In Latin American countries that is not necessarily so. Why have we avoided giving children the name "Jesus"?

### Joshua

When reading the King James Version, we can be brought up with a start by a couple of references to "Jesus" in Acts and Hebrews.

In his speech to the Jewish Sanhedrin, Stephen refers to the tabernacle, "Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David" (Acts 7.45 KJV). The same verse in the NIV reads, "Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David..." Aha! So the name "Jesus" here refers to "Joshua", Moses' successor, and the verse makes sense.

In Hebrews 4.8 we are again puzzled – "For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day." Once again, the NIV makes it plain – "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day."

Quite simply, the scholars who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek a couple of hundred years BC (the Septuagint, abbreviated as LXX) rendered the name “Joshua” as “Jesus.” This is the translation used by the writers of the New Testament.

Possibly many Jewish boys were named after this great leader who had followed Moses. Joshua the son of Nun was originally named “Hoshea” or “Oshea” by his family (note Dt. 32.44 and Num. 13.8 in KJV and NIV). The name means “salvation.” In Numbers 13.6, naming the spies who went into the land of Canaan, we are told that “Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua (Heb. *Yehoshua*)” – adding the divine name and meaning “the Lord (Yahweh) is salvation.”

Joshua was certainly a great deliverer who played a crucial role in bringing the Hebrew people across Jordan and into their promised land.

w Reflect for a moment on Joshua. Perhaps we hadn't expected to meet him as we considered the name of “Jesus.” In what ways did he “live up to” his name? We see him as a mighty deliverer, but not as the perfect deliverer. Why did Moses make that slight change to his name?

## Jesus

### Read: Luke 1.26-38 and Matthew 1.18-25.

Mary is told that the expected son, Jesus, “will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end... the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1.31-32,35).

Joseph is told, “[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1.21).

Jesus... Joshua... “the Lord is salvation” – “he will save his people from their sins.” The Son of God was born into the world to be the Saviour from sin.

We see it as he goes into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Mt. 4.1-11; Lk. 4.1-12). Part of the temptation was “if you are the Son of God” – in other words, prove your identity to yourself and declare your identity to all the people. The other part had to do with fulfilment of his mission. In a sense he had come to “win the world” and yet... the temptation of “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour” would be a pull away from the lonely and painful path to saving people from their sins.

The theme of his preaching began with the same call as John the Baptist, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (Mt. 4.17).

When criticised for eating a meal with the tax collectors and “sinners” who gathered at Matthew’s house, he said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (9.13).

When he spent time in Zacchaeus’ house, he said, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk. 19.9).

When teaching his disciples about the servant role they were to adopt, he said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10.45).

The theme comes through again in John 3.16 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

At Caesarea-Philippi – in the far north away from the crowds – Jesus asked them what people were saying about him. Peter made his bold confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16.16). “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (v. 21). The disciples didn’t understand, but, for Jesus, saving people from sin was the goal and passion of his life. To turn back from that was to give in to Satan (v. 23).

On the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus “about his departure which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem” (Lk. 9.31). The word for “departure” is *exodus* – his death would be a deliverance.

The disciples couldn’t accept his death as part of the mission of the one they had come to believe was the Messiah. For them, the Messiah would be the King on the throne of David. But we read, “Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!’” (Mt. 20.17-19). But Jesus had come to “save his people from their sins.”

As he celebrated the Passover with his disciples, he added two new significant elements to the meal, broken bread, the sign of his body, and a cup – “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (26.28).

And on the cross, ridiculed and beaten – “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23.34). He had come to “save his people from their sins.” At the end he said, “It is finished” (Jn 19.30).