

Many countries have baby naming ceremonies.

- Jewish boys are named on the 8th day and girls within the first two weeks. Often the infants' feet or body is dipped in a 'mikveh-bath.'
- Muslim babies are named on the 7th day.
- Hindus have a naming ceremony, but the traditions vary greatly from region to region.
- African Christians have a naming ceremony.

I have officiated at a baby naming. Roughly 10 names are said over the child. Each of these names are characteristics they hope the child will live up to. In a sense, it is a prayer for these qualities to take root in the child's life. The final name is the child's official name.

Because I did not speak the native language of the parents, for me, it was an exercise in reading phonics. It started out easy having only 5 or 6 syllables, but the names grew more complex, having 20 or 30 syllables. These syllables had no meaning for me. As the complexity grew, if I misspoke, the parents gently corrected me, and cheered and clapped if I got it correct. It was a lot of fun.

In a sense, Jesus had a naming ceremony ...

- An angel said to Mary, 'You are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High (Lk 1:31-32 NIV).'
- The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream as well, stating the same thing he did to Mary. 'You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins (Mt 1:21 NIV).'

That sounds like a baby naming ceremony to me.

The name 'Jesus' had significant meaning, even before Joseph and Mary's baby was born. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua which means the *LORD saves*.

yĕhōšûa (Hebrew) – YHWH is salvation or YHWH saves / has saved.

Iĕsous (Greek) – the LORD saves. 'Jesus' had deep significance for the Jews and Romans of that day. Even though it is technically repetitious, we say that Jesus is our savior.

After Jesus' birth the angel announced, 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord (Lk 2:11 NIV).' Three titles or names.

Today, we are going to unpack with it means that 'Jesus is our savior.' 'Savior' also has deep meaning, too.



Just as we name our babies with names that have significance, the title 'savior' grew out of the cultural soil of its day and became one of the main titles for Jesus.

'Savior (sōtēr)' ...

- Has no exact Hebrew / OT equivalent.
- 'Messiah' is the closest OT concept.
- Is not found in the earliest NT books (Mt or Mk).
- Is used in the older NT books (1&2Ti, Titus, & 2Pe). This tells me that the early Christians picked up the word savior from their culture because it said something about who Jesus was to their culture. Such as we would use the word 'online' – it has meaning today that wasn't there a few years ago.
- Could be used for the emperor, generals, and others for specific acts.
- 'Redeemer' is the closest NT concept.

As you know, we have been looking at Jesus' incarnation (birth) *through the eyes* of three evangelists: Matthew, Luke, and John.

- I was excited to preach this fresh look at the Christmas story.
- This was to be last Sunday's Christmas Eve message, but due to illness, I now get to *expand beyond* the birth stories.

Let's start with Matthew.

1. Matthew's Savior.

Matthew's Savior is the fulfillment of Jewish expectation and prophecy.

Key word = fulfilled. For example, Matthew highlights Jesus' royal birth with Joseph's genealogy, the Magi's worship, and Herod's anger.

Even though Matthew does not use the title 'savior' *the concept of being 'saved'* is used eleven times. For example, on two occasions Jesus rescued people from drowning:

- ‘Lord save us! We’re going to drown (Mt 8:25 NIV).’ – The disciples
- ‘He was afraid and, beginning to sink cried out, “Lord save me (Mt 14:30 NIV).”’ - Peter

Matthew points out that Jesus was not the type of savior the Jews expected. They desired a Messiah who would save them from the Romans. In fact, they taunted him on the cross, “‘You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, *save yourself!* Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God” ... “He saved others,” they said, “but *he can’t save himself!* He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him (Mt 27:40, 42 NIV).”’ Matthew Savior is a different kind of savior, it seems he cannot even rescue himself.

Let’s go back to what the angel said to Joseph: ‘You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins (Mt 1:21 NIV).’ Let’s imagine that Jesus rescues us from our sins; we are drowning in the consequences of our own selfishness and passions. Jesus grabs a hold of us and rescues us.

- If Jesus had not rescued us, we would drown and eternally perish. *Our current life* is due to his rescue.
- To save his people from their sins, Jesus exchanges his life for us. Matthew records that Jesus went to Peter’s house. There, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law, he drove out evil spirits from people and ‘healed all the sick (Mt 8:16 NIV).’ Then, it says, ‘This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases (Mt 8:17 NIV).”’ The word picture is not a rescue, but an exchange. He healed these people by assuming their brokenness and giving them his wholeness in return.
- But it is a costly exchange. Jesus taught, ‘Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it (Mt 16:25).’ Sin’s sickness is *exchanged* for wholeness by giving up the old life.
- Let Jesus save you today – let him exchange your old life for a new one.

Let’s move onto Luke’s savior.

2. Luke’s Savior.

The opening chapters of Luke give us the most detailed account of Jesus’ birth. Luke’s savior makes sense. He wrote so that they would have confidence in what they had been taught.

Key word = know. He gives us the facts of Jesus’ birth.

Luke uses the title savior:

- 'My spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Lk 1:47 NIV).' – Mary's song
- 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord (Lk 2:11 NIV).' – Angel's announcement

Luke's savior is a lot more than a rescue. For Luke, salvation is entrance into God's kingdom and participation in the kingdom *by faith*.

For example, Luke alone records the spiritual significance of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair.

- Jesus chided the ignorant Pharisees: 'You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. ⁴⁷"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love (Lk 7:45-47 NLT)." 'Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven (Lk 7:48 NLT)."'
- Jesus said to her, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace (Lk 7:50 NIV).' She was saved by her faith; faith expressed itself in this loving action.

Revelation is another way facet of how Luke understands salvation; it is going from ignorance to understanding. For example, when Jesus sent out the 72 disciples, they were sent out like 'lambs among wolves (Mt 10:3)' – ignorant and naïve.

- But when they go back, they reported success in casting out demons, healing the sick, and advancing the Kingdom. Jesus praises to the Father. Specifically, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because *you have hidden these things* from the wise and learned, and *revealed them to little children*. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do ... ²³ Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "*Blessed are the eyes that see what you see* (Lk 10:21, 23 NIV)."'
- For us Americans, salvation is making a personal decision, but for Luke, there is a moment of divine revelation when one knows about the Kingdom of God. These 72 had their eyes opened and became active participants in God's salvation.

My favorite revelation in Luke is the post resurrection appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

- Jesus overtakes them as they walk along and engages them with deep conversation, explaining how the prophets foretold Christ's suffering (Lk 24:26).
- Jesus stops to eat with them, and he gives thanks and breaks the bread. 'Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him ... ³² were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us ... and opened the Scriptures (Lk 24:31-32 NIV).'

- Let Jesus save you today - understand.

Luke wants us to know the truth about what happened. From the shepherds who witnessed the baby Jesus to the two witnesses on the road to Emmaus, Luke wants us to know the savior and be changed / saved.

Let's look at John, dear John.

3. John's Savior.

John's Savior is the Son of God who became flesh, the creator who entered creation.

Key word = Believe.

For example, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well and gently guides her into believing that he is the Messiah, the Savior (Jn 4:25-26). Later, the despised Samaritans, believe and declare 'That this man really is Savior of the world (Jn 4:42 NIV).'

John's heart is to convince his readers to believe in Jesus as savior. This is most clearly seen in Jesus' midnight conversation with the Nicodemus. You have heard it a thousand times: '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 (Jn 3:16 NIV).'

Let me break it down for today's subject:

- 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son' – God's part, Christmas incarnation
- 'That whoever believes in him' – our part, faith
- 'Shall not perish - salvation as rescue
- 'But have eternal life - salvation as life under God's rule (Jn 3:16 NIV).'

Let's say I am rescued from drowning; the rest of my life is due to the action of my rescuer. In the same way, the Roman concept of Savior includes this idea of coming under the rule and authority of the one who saved. A Roman general conquers and then becomes responsible for the ongoing governance and welfare of these people.

In the old days before motion sensors opened doors, stores had little mats that triggered the doors to open. It was a simple electric switch. One time, Connie and I were walking into a Farm & Fleet store and as we passed the exit, I noticed a little boy hanging on the

railing. His arms were draped over the railing, and he was just hanging there swinging, having fun. Just then, someone exited the store. They stepped on the pad. The door opened onto the boy, and he began to choke as his neck was between the railing the door. With one hand I instantly grabbed the door and tried to hold it back. I couldn't hold it, even with two hands. To make matters worse people kept coming out of the store, triggering the door. Soon, 2 or 3 men were fighting this door before someone pulled the child away.

That is what I imagine is going on in your heart. You want to believe, but are struggling with the Holy Spirit. You are caught between salvation and your desires, or your apathy.

- Perhaps you don't want to give up your independence, you like things as they are. You don't want to exchange anything yet.
- Perhaps you don't have enough evidence to believe yet.
- Perhaps you don't want to oppose the current worldview.
- Perhaps you have your doubts like Thomas.

Thomas was out getting a bagel when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. 'So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you (Jn 20:25-26 NIV)!"²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. *Stop doubting and believe.*"²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (Jn 20:27-29 NIV)."

- Let Jesus save you today – believe.

We have spent considerable time examining the witnesses to Jesus' birth. Peter boldly declared, 'We are witnesses of this (Acts 3:15 NIV).'

Your perspective of Jesus is going to be different from mine and from the Gospel evangelists because you're wrestling with the Holy Spirit, your context, and your life story is different than others.

- Matthew was amazed at seeing all the fulfilled prophecy.
- Luke's belief was built fact upon fact, interviewing of the eyewitnesses.
- And John was in awe that God would step into this world to save up.

Stop struggling today and put your faith in Jesus. He is a kind and gracious savior, under whose rule you will flourish. You don't need to touch him to believe, you will be blessed for believing.

Jesus is our savior and I can think of no better way to start the New Year, then to experience the rescue, the exchange of the Savior.

Pray.