

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



THE NAMES
OF JESUS

NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES: JESUS, THE MESSIAH

A first-century tax collector turned preacher, Matthew, wrote about God's gift to us in the first two chapters of his brilliant book. The Book of Matthew is the first book of the New Testament. Have you ever wondered why it's the first? It wasn't written first. That was Mark. It's not the longest. That award goes to Luke. It doesn't start the earliest in history. That one is John. Why on earth is Matthew first? This Gospel was designed to connect all the dots from the promises of the Old Testament to God's gift within the New Testament. What was this gift? It wasn't a toy, gift card, or sweater. His name was Jesus, the Messiah, who was born in Bethlehem on the first unofficial Christmas.

Let's look at just a few of the predictions from the Old Testament and see if they seem to point to the One whose birth we celebrate every December. Before we start, it is important to note that some critics say that Jesus intentionally tried to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies so He could claim to be the foretold Messiah. In fact, there were quite a few people who did try to claim that title both before and after Jesus walked the earth. Following are some of the predictions with which they would have been familiar when they made their claims, most of which were fulfilled in Christ's birth alone.

Matthew helps tie a bow on significant prophecies from the Old Testament and how Jesus fulfilled them. He shows that Jesus was born in Bethlehem which the prophet Micah predicted (Micah 5:2). He reported that Jesus would be visited by rulers from distant lands with gifts which the Psalm writers predicted (Psalm 72:10). As if that weren't enough, we see prophecies that Christ would be a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 22:18) and of Jacob (Numbers 24:17), from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and a descendant of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1) and David (Jeremiah 23:5). That's why Matthew starts his book with the genealogy of Jesus. Every name is attaching God's promises in the Old Testament to God's work in the New Testament.

Just like most kids, I always loved receiving presents at Christmas time. Whenever I saw my name on a present tag, I would be thrilled. The name on the tag meant it was for me. I got to receive the blessing of the gift. This was also true for the ancient world when they saw two names show up on the pages of Matthew's gospel—Jesus and Messiah.

These were like names on a gift tag. Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah who would usher in an era of peace, favor, restoration, and justice for God's people (Isaiah 61:1-3).

The mere mention of Messiah sent shockwaves through Israel. This was the gift they had been waiting for. And there it was. Scribbled onto a scroll that may as well have been a gift tag on a colorful box, the Messiah was here to give God's gifts to God's people.

Jesus, the Messiah had arrived. Both words were so much more significant than mere names. They are power-packed declarations about what God was doing for all nations. Let's explore what each name means for us today.

READ: Matthew 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Joseph, a small-town carpenter, was head-over-heels in love with a girl named Mary. He loved her so much that he saved up his hard-earned money, bought a ring, and popped the question. They were engaged to be married and he couldn't have been happier. The butterflies in his stomach morphed into bats when he got some dreadful news. Mary was pregnant.

Joseph was a godly man, so he wasn't the one who had gotten her pregnant. Now what? The only logical explanation was that Mary had been unfaithful, so Joseph planned to leave her secretly. I get it, that sounds harsh. However, this just goes to show how merciful Joseph truly was. He was a strict man of the Law. He was torn between the Law and his love.

Unfortunately, back then, the Law demanded she would be stoned to death. Joseph couldn't stand to see it, so he decided to live in the heartbreak forever instead of seeing her be harmed. If he chose to secretly leave, she could be shown mercy far more easily. However, due to his deep devotion, sticking around would not be an option. It was a death wish. His family wouldn't allow it, they'd ensure justice was

sought. His city could likely mob and stone them both if they rebelled together. He just couldn't bear to do that to Mary.

Angry. Confused. Restless. Joseph found himself tossing and turning in his bed. Then, an angel lights up his room like a firework. He rubs his eyes to see a radiant being, clearly from God, standing at the foot of his bed. He wasn't hallucinating either. He was on Holy Ground.

God was sending Him a message that would change the world forever. The angel explained that Mary had not been unfaithful. Rather, she was carrying the Son of God. She was carrying a baby boy. I imagine a smile crept across his cheeks when he heard that he was going to have a son. Then the angel went on to elaborate that they were to call Him Jesus because He is the Messiah.

Joseph, being a devout man of faith, likely dropped his jaw to the floor. He inevitably remembered Isaiah's prophecy of the "anointed Messiah" (Isaiah 32, 53, 61). The prophecy was coming to pass and his beloved Mary was helping make it happen. "Jesus, the Messiah." These two names are a big deal for all people. What do those names mean though? Let's unwrap them together.

The Messiah: Our King

Matthew's primary goal was to prove that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah. For that reason, he uses the term Messiah more than any other New Testament author. You can tell by the fact he leverages the word six times in the first chapter alone, which is almost entirely made up by a genealogy of names you cannot pronounce. When he breaks into narrative he says, "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about."

The Messiah's message was monumental for Israel. For thousands of years, God had promised to send a Messiah to His people and they were counting down the days ever since. The term, *māšīyah*, is rooted in royalty. It literally means anointed, which is a reference to when the High Priest would anoint the head of a king with oil on their inauguration day. The perfect anointed King was coming and Israel prayed for their arrival every single day. They imagined another David, Joshua, or Solomon. They were expecting military force, strength, and a little bit of fanfare.

Then, the title of Messiah was given to Jesus. A poor baby boy from the country with an unmarried pregnant woman for a mom and a struggling carpenter for a dad. Jesus wasn't born into a family of royalty, as an heir to the throne, or even in a bed. Instead, the Son of God was born in a pile of hay in a feeding vessel for animals surrounded by a poor family who had been ostracized out of fear of religious persecution. That's how the Messiah came into the world.

Christ (the Greek name for Messiah) looked nothing like anyone expected. He was brutally poor, they expected a wealthy King like Solomon. He was soft-spoken and patient, they expected a bombastic personality like David. He was an advocate of peace, they expected a warrior like Joshua to topple Rome like Jericho. He built a small team of twelve particularly scrappy disciples, they expected a person to spark a multi-million-person movement like Moses. Jesus was an enigma.

Maybe Jesus hasn't been who you expected Him to be either. Maybe you expected Jesus to give you perfect peace, but you are still dealing with stress. Maybe you expected Jesus to let you get into your dream career, but no one is hiring. Maybe you expected Jesus to heal your loved one, but now you're visiting the hospital on December 24th. For many of us, just like for Israel, Jesus has moved in ways that we didn't expect. That's a good thing. God's unexpected movements set us up for unexplainable moments.

God uses the unexpected to set up the unbelievable. If you really look hard, I am sure you have seen that play out in your life. You have seen a detour put you back on the right path. You have seen a person show up in your life at the perfect time. You have seen a difficult season set you up for a dream come true. When God is moving in your life, get excited when you encounter the unexpected. It may mean God's up to something big.

Jesus: Our Savior

Joseph was given a big task. He was entrusted to raise God's Son on earth. He was going to have to teach this boy how to walk, talk, and build birdhouses to sell at the local flea market. How did any of that make sense though? This child was

supernatural. This child was God in the flesh. Was Joseph really going to have to teach the Torah to the one who helped inspire it? None of this made sense, did it?

I am sure you have been there. You have been stuck between what God says and what makes sense. God promised He'd provide for you, but now you are pinching pennies to get by. God promised you'd never be forsaken, but you're alone on the holidays. God said you're fearfully and wonderfully made, but you cannot seem to overcome a debilitating feeling of insecurity within you. Joseph relates. He believed what God said, but He just didn't know why God would do it in the first place. It just didn't make sense...yet. Knowing He'd be wondering that, God gave Him a hint in the form of a name. The angel commanded they call the baby Jesus.

I don't want to burst your bubble, but Jesus's name isn't actually Jesus. That's an English transliteration of His name. His real name is *Yahshua*, so a straightforward translation would be Joshua. Since it's the same Hebrew name as the Old Testament leader, in modern times, we distinguish them to make them less confusing. So what does Christ's name, in the original language, actually mean? The Hebrew word, "Yahshua" means "God saves."

Jesus entered the world as an unexpected outcast but proved that He was so much more. He healed the blind, cured the sick, raised the dead, died on the cross, and then defeated death for us all. God sent Jesus to be your Savior. He saves you from your sins and gives you a fresh start. That's better than any Christmas gift I can comprehend!

Our salvation is also so much bigger than our final destination in heaven too. God saves us here and now as well. He saves eternally and presently. That's the beauty of His activity here on Earth. Jesus also wants to save you from anything presently coming between you and Him. Jesus can save you from your overwhelming thoughts because He is peace. He can save you from darkness because He is light. Yahshua can save you from your guilt because He forgives you. Jesus can save you from death because He offers eternal life.

It's time to really celebrate the true gift of Christmas. Wait, let's slow down. Just look at the word. Christ-mass, which is a combination of the Latin words *Christus* and *Messa*.

The first means messiah and the second means arrival. The Messiah has come. It's time to celebrate!

God gave you the perfect gift in the form of an Anointed King who saves His people from the powers of darkness, sin, and death. This holiday is about so much more than cookies, lights, and sugar plums. It's about Jesus. God loves you so much that He stepped out of his heavenly home to be homeless, walk the rocky earth, and die a painful death. Why? So you could have the gift of eternal life. This beautiful gift has your name written in bold letters across the top.

Just like any gift, all you need to do is receive it. When you do, everything changes.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out to you from today's message?

Q2: What is your favorite part about the Christmas season? What is the most challenging part for you?

Q3: Why is it significant that Jesus was called the Messiah?

Q4: What is the normal reaction towards God when things in life do not work out like we expected them to?

Q5: Jesus saves us, both eternally and presently. What are circumstances that you need His help in right now?

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Luke 1:26-38

Isaiah 9:2-7

Acts 1:1-8

James 1:13-18

Psalm 27:7-14

Jude 1:20-25

Romans 8:19-27

Psalm 25:1-5

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.