

## Born to Die

**Matthew 1:18-25** Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 Jesus is a popular guy. He can be your homeboy, your role model, your teacher, your best friend. You can get Him as an action figure, a Christmas tree ornament, a bobble-head doll, an air freshener, even a piggy bank. He can be the subject of a blockbuster movie or a New York Times bestseller. People spend exorbitant amounts of money in the month of December to give gifts to each other, to host big parties, to travel to be with family and friends supposedly in celebration of His birthday. Few people deny He existed, although there may be different interpretations of who He is: a Prophet to Islam, an enlightened one to Buddhism, an avatar to Hinduism, the son of God the Father and his wife to Mormonism. Even nonreligious people will find in Jesus a good, moral teacher, someone whose good deeds we can emulate to live better lives.

2 No matter how much you'd like to make something nice and accessible out of Jesus, though, you can't get around His name. They could have named Him anything else, anything more accessible, but they didn't. Joseph obeyed the command of the Angel of the Lord and gave to this boy born of his virgin wife a particular name. "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." In Hebrew, the name is Joshua, meaning "The Lord saves." In this name—given to the Son of God in the flesh when He was 8 days old—is a confession. This baby is the Lord. And this

Lord will save his people. But more than that, even what His people need to be saved from is mentioned: their sins. To call Him Jesus is to confess that He is the Lord, that you have sins, and that only He can save you from your sins.

3 You were willing to let Jesus be a lot of things: your friend, your example, even your Sunday morning pastime. But a savior? From sins? Not quite. You'll take help in life. You'll hire a therapist, or a life coach, or a personal trainer. They can solve your problems without forcing you to admit you have some sins. And even if you come face-to-face with some sins, these helpers can enable you to save yourself from these sins. You certainly don't need a Jesus, especially if even speaking His name confesses you've got some sins from which you need to be saved.

4 This baby in a manger, the one they named the Savior-from-your-sins, would grow up. The one you've gathered to honor in the manger wouldn't stay in the manger for long. And when He grew up, He'd speak some harsh words. Here are a few. "You've heard it said, 'You shall not murder,' but I say everyone who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment." (Mt 5:21-22) "You've heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say to you that anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery." (Mt 5:27-28) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." (Mk 12:30-31) "Everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin." (Jn 8:34) Had enough yet? Here's the kicker: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48) Be careful how close you come to the manger: this is no warm-fuzzy savior. He won't let you get away with thinking yourself righteous unless you're perfect. And anything less than perfection is worthy of hell.

5 Even if you admit that you've got some sins, you're not ready to be saved from them. Quite frankly, some sins seem fun. Society rewards the guy who "lives it up," enjoys a "full life," gives the biggest presents, and throws the grandest parties. The last

thing you suppose you need around Christmas time is any talk of sin or repentance. Sin-talk just seems to dampen the party spirit. Addressing the sin of materialism and greed keeps you from fully enjoying the presents under the tree. Speaking of laziness or spiritual sloth gets your mind wondering whether you devote more work and effort into getting ready for the Christmas celebration than for the Lord's return. Mentioning gluttony just keeps you from enjoying the Christmas Day feast. "So," you say, "Jesus, you can be a cute baby in a manger, as long as you don't give us any of this talk about sin or call us to repentance."

6 If you enjoy your sin for the time being, watch out. The same Savior swaddled in a manger is the Ascended One who promises His return. And at His return, He'll expect all sins to be accounted for and answered. On that day, every sin will be answered for. Any sins not answered for by the One born to save His people from their sins, the One whose name promises that He will not call you to save yourself for your own sins, any sins left outside that name will be sins you'll answer for yourself. So repent. Repent of supposing that your sins aren't big enough to earn you hell. Repent of thinking that you can save yourself from any sins you might have. Repent of thinking yourself free from sins. And repent of lightly using the name Jesus without acknowledging what that name confesses: you have sins from which you cannot save yourself.

7 So thanks be to God that they named this baby Jesus. Since Adam and Eve plucked the fruit from the tree in the Garden of Eden in disobedience to the Heavenly Father, since they took it upon themselves to be their own gods, this Savior has been coming. When the Lord banished Adam and Eve from the Garden, he cut down the tree of life, as well. Death was the consequence of sin. But out of the trunk of that tree of life, he has hewn the wooden manger for the infant Savior. There in the manger, is life for you. The tree of life was planted again, not in a Garden this time, but on the very hill of death. The tree of life was planted at the place of the Skull, Golgotha, Calvary. The

baby in the manger was never meant to be a cute and cuddly savior. He was born to die. And so, with your flesh, the One who was to save His people from their sins took their sins—your sins—upon himself and was nailed to the tree of life. The tree, the cross, that brought Him death brings you life. Adam and Eve were banished from the tree in the Garden. And God banished himself to this tree, allowed Himself to be nailed to it, in order that it might again give life mankind.

8        So the Savior upon the Tree of Life, the Cross, delivers life. He was born precisely because you could not save yourself from your sins. He was born precisely because your sins would otherwise have earned you hell and eternal death. He was born precisely to make you a part of His people, whom He saves from their sins. That's what His name means, after all.

9        The wood of the tree of life was cut down from Calvary, as well. And yet the tree that gives life because it was watered by the water and blood flowing from the side of the Crucified Savior is still planted. It grows here, too. From the wooden font, the Lord continues to give life. He has shed His blood to pay for your sins, and He gives that forgiveness out in these otherwise simple waters. Here, He has joined you to Himself, made you a part of His chosen people, the people He has saved from their sins. And the wood of the tree of life can be found in the wooden rail before the Lord's altar, as well. At this rail, the Lord delivers His very Body and Blood into your mouths for the forgiveness of sins.

10       Jesus, the one who by His name has promised to save you from your sins gives to you today exactly that: forgiveness of sins. This gift is greater—immeasurably greater—than any gift you will give or receive. This gift gives life. His name is Jesus. He has placed this very name upon you in the waters of Holy Baptism. You may thus say, "His name is Jesus because He has saved me and all His people from their sins."

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
Pastor Jeff Hemmer  
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