

Series: What's In a Name?

December 11, 2016

## **Title: Joseph**

**[Slide 1]**

**Text: Matthew 1-2**

### **What's in a name?**

#### **Names tell a story:**

Just the mention of a name can tell a story. What do you think of when you hear the names "Luke Skywalker," "Princess Leia," "Hans Solo," and "Darth Vader"?

X Wing fighters, Storm Troopers, light sabers, Jedi Knights, R2D2 and CP30. You see them all once again when you hear those familiar names. Is it any wonder that when it was time to revive the Star Wars story, three old baby boomers were in the sequel? Just say their names and the story is there. In fact, the *new story* won't make sense unless you know the old one.

Names tell a story.

#### **The Christmas Story:**

So what names make you think of the Christmas story? Old Saint Nick or Frosty the Snowman? How about The Grinch?

The problem with all of these names is that none of them speak to the real story of God's Son coming into the world. Christmas degenerates into a cultural holiday devoid of any deeper meaning than parties and presents, lights and winter solstice.

Matthew and Luke faced this dilemma when they set out to tell the Christmas story. In order for it to make sense to their readers, they needed to tell it in such a way that their readers could see all the bits and pieces of their own story fitting together. The birth of the Messiah had to be part of the bigger story of God rescuing and restoring His world.

That's why Matthew's Gospel begins with names: lots of names! Together, the names of Jesus' ancestors tell the whole story of God's people, right up

to the moment of Jesus' birth. Just recounting those names gave Matthew's Jewish readers a refresher in their national story.

The genealogy reaches its climax with these words:

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*Matthew 1:16 NIV*

*And Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.*

There they are: the three main characters of the Christmas Story: **Joseph**, **Mary** and **Jesus**. Each of these names reminds us of the stories that came before Jesus' birth. Each one tells its own story. Put them together and you can tell the most important story of all – the story of God's own Son and Savior coming into the world.

## **Joseph**

### **Joseph, son of Jacob:**

The first name that Matthew presents us with is that of Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. Notice again how Joseph is introduced in the genealogy of Jesus:

*"...and Jacob the father of Joseph..."*

Way back near the very beginning of the story of God's people, there was a man named Jacob. He was Abraham's grandson. After an all-night struggle with God, Jacob was renamed Israel. And this Jacob had 12 sons who would become the 12 tribes of Israel. His favorite son was named Joseph.

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Joseph was not only his father's favorite – not necessarily a good thing in a complicated and dysfunctional family! He was a dreamer of dreams. He received dreams from God and was also blessed with the ability to interpret them – thus giving him a window into the future.

This gift, used in an immature and unwise way by a young Joseph, got him in a world of hurt with his jealous brothers. They kidnapped him, sold him into slavery, and convinced his father that he had been killed by a wild

animal. There would be no search parties. Joseph was gone forever – or so they thought.

For Joseph things went from bad to worse: once in Egypt, he was convicted of a crime he did not commit, put in jail for many years, forgotten by his friends. Forgotten, that is, until the Pharaoh had a troubling dream that no one could interpret. Then it was that this forgotten Hebrew slave was called from his dungeon, dressed to meet the king, and proceeded to interpret the king's dream. As a result, Joseph became second to Pharaoh and was used by God to save both Egypt and his own family from death by famine.

This is the story that came with the name "Joseph."

### **Joseph and Egypt:**

So when Jewish people of Matthew's time heard the name Joseph, they would have thought: **Egypt/dreams/deliverance**. That was the Joseph story. Joseph was the reason that their ancestors had left Canaan and settled for 400 years in Egypt. Joseph's story was the beginning of the Exodus story, a story that led straight to Moses.

The ancient historian Josephus, writing just a few years after Matthew's Gospel was written, retells this Exodus story as it was known and told in the Jewish world of Jesus' time. His telling of the Exodus fills in some of the spaces "between the lines" of the original story.

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- In this telling of the story, the evil Pharaoh who had enslaved the Hebrew people was miraculously warned by his "sacred scribes" that a Hebrew child would be born who would threaten his entire kingdom. Another story told at that time said that it was magicians, or "magi" who warned the king.
- The news that the birth of a Hebrew deliverer was at hand filled the Egyptians with dread. As a result, Pharaoh commanded that all the male Hebrew babies be executed.
- Meanwhile, a Hebrew named Amram and his wife were expecting a child. Before the child was born, Amram had a dream in which God told him not to despair of the future. His child would escape those who were seeking to kill him, and he would "deliver the Hebrew race from their bondage in Egypt."

- It was this child who grew up to be none other than Moses, the man God used to bring His people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land.

### **A second Joseph:**

When Matthew's readers heard that Jesus' earthly father was named Joseph, son of Jacob, they could not help but relive in their minds the Joseph/Egypt/Exodus story. And notice the details in Matthew's Christmas story that help them make the connection:

- In the place of a paranoid Pharaoh, there was now a paranoid Herod.
- He learns of the birth of the Hebrew deliverer through magi who have come to worship the new-born king.
- He learns the location of the baby's birth from his high priest and scribes – just as Pharaoh had learned of the coming deliverer from his "priestly scribes."
- Herod and Jerusalem are filled with fear.
- Herod commands that all the Hebrew male infants 2 years old and under in Bethlehem be put to death.
- But Joseph has had a dream in which the angel of the Lord told him not to be afraid; the baby to be born is the coming savior.
- And after the visit of the magi, the angel of the Lord comes to Joseph again in a dream:

### **[Slide 5]**

*Matthew 2:13 NIV*

*"Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."*

- And so, just as Joseph brought the Hebrew people to Egypt for their safety, now a new Joseph brings the very first member of God's New Israel to Egypt for his safety.
- And just as God called Israel out of Egypt to become his son, Matthew tells us:

### **[Slide 6]**

*Matthew 2:15 NIV*

*And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."*

When Matthew told the Christmas story, he took his readers all the way back to Egypt and the Exodus. Why? Because they needed to understand that the Baby born to be King was not going to rule in the usual way – like the emperor in Rome or the tyrant Herod in Jerusalem. He was going to be a King who changed the world much like his earthly father's namesake: Joseph.

His Kingdom would bring a New Exodus out of sin and death. It would be something that God alone could do.

## **What's your story?**

### **A new story:**

Stories are the most powerful things in our world. They tell us where we come from, who we are and where we're going. That's because stories have the power to tell us not only where we've been, but even more importantly, where we're going.

Just as God called Joseph to be the person to launch the New Exodus out of sin and death, He is calling you and me to be "Josephs" in our own time. Our story is a continuation of the same story that reaches back to a teenager sold into slavery in Egypt and a man with the same name who named his son Jesus.

### **Joseph in a new time:**

God is looking for people right here and right now who will dream God's dreams. He is looking for people who are not afraid to step out and trust Him when the chips are down. He is looking for people who will *name Jesus* in our day. He is looking for people who will protect and nurture the gift of God's Presence in a dark world. He is looking for people who will launch that Exodus out of sin and into God's bright light.

God is looking for you and me to be a Joseph in a new time.

## **What's your story?**

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But in order for that to happen, you must allow God to make His story your story. We all have a story in our heads. We began learning and living it before we could say our own names. It comes naturally to us. It sets fixed limits on what we dare to believe about ourselves and others. But it's not God's story.

The Christmas story dares you and me to leave our own old stories behind and become the sequel in God's story. It's a story in which we learn to dream God's dreams, name God's Son, and point the way out of our Egypt to God's Promised Land.

So what's your story? Is it all about you? Is it a story of being a victim? Is it a story in which you always have to be the star? Is it a story defined by the fickle values of the world around you? Or is it the story of becoming God's child?

Dare to dream God's dreams. Dare to name Jesus in your life and your world. Dare to be a Joseph.

## LIFE Group lesson for "Joseph":

### Ice Breaker:

- Share a favorite Christmas tradition from your own past. In what way is that story part of your Christmas celebration today?

### What's in a name?

- For most of us, the Christmas Story *starts* with angels proclaiming the coming birth of the Messiah.
- But for the Matthew and Luke the Christmas Story began many hundreds of years earlier. It began with the tragedy of a spoiled teenager being kidnapped and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers!
- That young man, Joseph, brought God's people Israel to Egypt to save them from certain death by famine. And on his death bed he commanded his family to bring his bones back to the Promised Land.
- Joseph launched what would one day be the great Exodus Journey.
- So, what's in a name? Well, in the name "Joseph" we have the heart of the story of God's People, from Egypt to Exodus.

### Joseph:

- Imagine, then, what a Jewish people pictured when they read Matthew's Christmas Story. It begins with a "Joseph, son of Jacob!" It has a wicked king who is determined to kill the baby Messiah. It has an escape to Egypt and ultimately a return to the Promised Land.
- In essence, we have the whole history of Israel relived in the beginning of the Good News of Jesus!

### Your story:

- Stories go both ways: back into the past, and forward into the future.
- So what is the future aspect of a Christmas Story that reaches back to Egypt and the birth of the Messiah? The future aspect is **your story**.
- God is looking for you to be a person with a Joseph spirit:
  - Dreaming God's dreams
  - Putting God's plans into action
  - Taking daring journeys
  - Naming Jesus in a new day