**Sermon for Bluff, 20 Dec 2020**

**“you will name him Jesus – because he will save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1.21)

**“he will be called Immanuel (which means, ‘God is with us’)** (Matthew 1.23)

**“Where will the Messiah be born?”** (Matthew 2.4)

Names were important in Bible culture. In Genesis places are named for special reasons (eg Bethel)

Sometimes in the Bible babies are given names before they are born:

Gen 16.11 – Ishmael; Gen 17.19 – Isaac; 1 Kings 13.2 – Josiah; Luke 1.13 – John the Baptist.

Matthew records three names Jesus was given at or before his birth – each one is significant.

We think of them as names but they were really titles, describing the future role of this baby.

[1] **Jesus** (Matt 1.21)

Jesus = Saviour. Saving from what? Sins = disobedience to God, and missing the mark, though we could see this as all that is wrong in life, caused by humanity, accidently or deliberately.

Jesus as Saviour is something we associate with his Death and Resurrection – that is why he came.

This name at its heart is a deliverance from of our **past**.

[2] **Immanuel** (Matt 1.23)

This comes from Isaiah 7.14 and may have referred initially to a future royal baby soon to be born,

but Christians think of Jesus.

It is more than a mere bland statement, as if God is hanging around watching;
it is a deep reassurance – whatever the circumstances God is there and will act on our behalf. Jesus knew God’s presence, so it came as a great shock when he experienced God’s abandonment (Mark 15.34).

This name at its heart is a declaration of our **present**.

[3] **Messiah** (Matt 2.4)

Messiah = Christ, which was not Jesus’ surname, but a title of his.

John the Baptist said he was not the Messiah (John 1.20). At Caesarea Philippi Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah, (Mark 8.29) and at Jesus’ trial he is asked if he is the Messiah (Mark 14.61).

Messiah (Christos in Greek) means The Anointed One = the King blessed by God.

ie it is about God’s future reign, which the coming King will bring into reality, and which we only partially know now.

This name at its heart is a description of our **future**.

So this baby, whose birth we celebrate on Christmas Day, is named in such a way as to be influential in our past, present and future. And this comes from a God who deeply cares for us.

No wonder we call this a season of Good News!