

Faith Matters # 9 – Names of Jesus – April 23

People are known by many names, depending on who is talking to or about them. For example a woman may be known as “doctor” by her patients, as “mother” by her children, as “Elder” by church members; she may be referred to by committee members as their “secretary”, as “sister”, “neighbour”, and so on.

The same is true of Jesus who is referred to in the Bible as Messiah, Emmanuel, Son of God, Saviour, Christ, Redeemer, Rabbi, and other names. The name they called him depended on which role the writer or speaker was considering. Even the name “Jesus” is a Greek name meaning “Saviour”. “You shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people Israel” (Mt. 1:21).

A messiah is a liberator of oppressed people. The Jews longed for a messiah to liberate them from the control of the Roman Empire. Christians discovered that Jesus liberated people from the power of sin and death. The Messiah sets us free.

The name “Emmanuel” contains one of the Hebrew names of God, “El”. We often find God’s name included in people’s names: “Samu-el” (heard of God), “Dani-el” (God is judge), “Ezeki-el” (God is strength). “Emmanuel” (often spelled “Immanuel”) translates “God is with us” (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). What a wonderful name for Jesus: God is with us! Our Saviour, that is, “Jesus”, is with us!

The name “Christ” comes from the Greek word meaning “anointed”, that is, ceremonially set aside for a special holy task. Jesus was anointed at his baptism by the Holy Spirit to be our Saviour, God’s presence with us.

In ancient times, names were extremely important; they could be confessions of faith. For that reason one of the Ten Commandments says: “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name” (Exodus 20:7).

In a later “Faith Matters” talk, we’ll consider some of Jesus’ other names. Meanwhile, let us rejoice that Jesus (that is, Saviour) is in fact “God with us” (Immanuel) who was anointed (Christ) to liberate us (Messiah) from evil. Our faith summer up in names!

(by Rev. Willard Pottinger, Erskine Presbyterian Church)