



Theme: Christmas Wisdom
"Wisdom in the Names of Jesus"

Christmas Eve Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, December 20-21, 2025

Weekly Memory Verses:

²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" – Matthew 1:23

VIDEO Sermon Starter

SLIDE "Wisdom in the Names of Jesus"

Today we continue in this series of sermons we're doing on the wisdom we find in the Christmas story. We began 3 weeks ago by looking at the family of Jesus and then we focused on Mary. Last week we turned our attention to Joseph whose story we hear most fully in the Gospel of Matthew, which is the same place in which we find the Magi. We turn our attention today to the wisdom we find in the names give to Jesus in the birth stories in the gospels. I wanted to share with you another cartoon that one of you sent me years ago as a Christmas card. It depicts Joseph being confronted by some mice while Mary tends to the baby Jesus. The mice ask, **"So, where's the baby cheeses we heard so much about?"**

GRAPHIC Baby Cheeses cartoon

I know that's bad, but one of you sent me the card, so it's your fault. The people I get to serve in this church are unique to say the least! I know it seems a bit silly, but the humor does remind us that the names give to Jesus give us much wisdom in the Christmas season and really for all our lives. We may have never given much thought to the names of Jesus but they each have deep meaning and it's worth our while as we approach Christmas Eve to think about the names given to him by his parents that came from dreams and visits of angels. I was reminded this week of a phenomenon which has to do with our names. I had never heard of it before, so I found it rather amusing.

SLIDE Nominative Determinism

Nominative determinism is the theory that people gravitate towards careers, locations, or interests that match their names, like "Sandy Fish" who became a marine biologist. "Dr. Barksdale" is a veterinarian. "Phil McCann" was a news reporter on the fuel crisis. It's a psychological phenomenon rooted in implicit egotism, suggesting a subconscious preference for things that share letters with one's own name, leading to amusing real-world examples and studies exploring its connection to life choices.

The idea that people are drawn to professions that fit their name was suggested by the psychologist Carl Jung, citing as an example Sigmund Freud who studied pleasure and whose surname means "joy." The term was first used in the magazine *New Scientist* in 1994, after the magazine's humorous "Feedback" column noted several scientific studies carried out by researchers with remarkably fitting surnames. These included a book on polar explorations by "Daniel Snowman" and an article on urology by researchers named "Splatt and Weedon."

You can't make this stuff up! What's interesting about the scriptures is that we find many characters whose names tell us a bit about their story. In the book of Genesis, we find Jacob who is the Son of

Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. His name means “one who deceives.” He deceives his brother by stealing his birthright. His grandfather had his name changed from Abram to Abraham which means “father of many nations.” His name is changed to reflect who he will be. Jacob whose name we learned meant deceiver has his name changed to Israel which means “one who wrestles with God,” which Jacob did and lived. In the New Testament we find the disciple Simon whose name is changed to Peter whose name means “rock,” because on this rock Jesus would build the church.

The first people who would read Matthew's gospel were Jewish Christians and so they would have known the importance of these names. When we hear two names given to the baby Jesus, we are meant to take notice and understand there is deep meaning in both names. This would have been understood by those first followers of Jesus. There is something we are meant to hear and know when it comes to these names throughout the scriptures. They are meant to bring wisdom. They are meant to help us understand why this child came for us and what it means for our lives today, just as it had meaning for those first people to encounter the Christ child.

BIBLE

²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

SLIDE YHWH = “the name of God”

YASHA = “to save or deliver”

Yehoshua = “God save, helps, delivers”

We get the name Jesus from these two words Yahweh and Yasha which means when you put them together that God saves or helps or delivers. The idea is that this child who has been born is God in the flesh who will save, help, and deliver us. There is an invitation in the word to invite God in to help us do things we cannot do for ourselves. I remember

during the pandemic when restaurants were allowed to stay open, but we had to either pick up the food or have it delivered. I remember visiting with many who were homebound or who had no transportation and they depended on people to bring them food, or they would starve to death. There was this idea that delivery was essential to life for many people and the idea is that this child has come to deliver us and to do for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

The other day I caught my daughter speaking roughly to her boyfriend and afterwards I lovingly brought it up and tried to suggest she be a bit softer with him. She simply looked at me with a smile and said, "I learned that from you dad." I laughed and found myself remembering all the times I had lost my temper with my kids when they were younger or sometimes with my spouse or in other situations. No matter how hard I have tried in life, sometimes I fail and fall short. Sometimes, I am not my best self, and it rubs off on the next generation even. Isn't that frustrating? We need salvation from ourselves, and we need a savior who not only offers us grace and loves us where we are but loves us enough not to keep us there.

I was meeting recently with someone who was grieving a parent that died recently. They had been looking forward to seeing them this Christmas because they had never been honest with them about some ways in which their parents had hurt them. It had caused a distance to grow between them, and they had desperately hoped to clear the air and start new this Christmas season. They were devastated that they could not repair that relationship before their parent died suddenly and so we did two things together.

First, I had them pretend their parent was in an empty chair in my office and I had them say to that empty chair what they had hoped to say to their parent. I then had them say out loud what they hoped their parent might say to them in response. We then imagined that Jesus was in the chair and he offered forgiveness and grace because what he wanted was for them to let go of the bitterness and the pain so they

could live life in freedom again. We prayed that God might do something through the presence of Jesus Christ and deliver this person from the pain and the grief they were carrying.

When I do funerals that have happened suddenly and people have distance between them and their loved one because they never got to resolve some issues, I encourage them to do 5 things. I've done this a few times in the past few months at funerals where people have died tragically and I have many people who are not people of faith that say they appreciate these five things and they are going to go home and do them. I also try to lovingly encourage them to imagine that Jesus can meet them as they write these five things down and deliver us from things that we can't fix on our own. One of the things that are so powerful about being a follower of Jesus is that we have a resource that we celebrate this season of Christmas. It's a name that offers salvation and deliverance and practical help so that we can let go of the things that we carry with us. If you have never heard me share these five things, here they are again.

SLIDE Thank you for... (have fly in)

Forgive me for...

I forgive you for...

I love you...

Goodbye...

What's interesting is that every time I share this list with people, I get honest pushback on each one of them at different times. Some people are not sure they can thank someone because of pain this person has inflicted and never apologized for. Some are not sure they can verbalize anything they did wrong in their relationship or any way in which they caused hurt. Some are not sure how to forgive someone for pain that runs so deep. I try to remind them that forgiveness is not about saying what happened to us was right or was OK, but it's about letting go

of the bitterness and desire for retribution. It's about keeping ourselves from being destroyed from the inside out.

I had someone tell me recently after seeing this list that they had never told the person they loved them and they wished they had done that in person. They weren't sure that saying it now would make any difference. And I had one young person whose spouse had died who said they didn't want to say goodbye, and they weren't ready to do that. I get all those things and all those feelings. They are real and they are true and they also are good reminders of why we need a savior and a deliverer and a helper.

There is some healing we can't do on our own. I visited recently with someone who had a very serious illness and was facing major surgery. It's the kind of surgery that couldn't even be done 50 or 60 years ago and now we take it for granted. We talked about how it felt like the surgeon and the nurses working with them are like saviors who were giving them a new lease on life. We laughed at the idea of those medical professionals being saviors because while they might put off death for a while for us, eventually death comes for us all. Who will save us then?

What I've learned in my own life is there are moments where I just can't do things on my own. Whether it's parenting or dealing with loss or a conflict I can't resolve for whatever reason, I need saving from the things in life that overwhelm me and sometimes for myself. In our tradition we talk about these moments as sin. I remind you often that sin is not about a list of things we do or don't do but about the status of our relationship with God, with others, and within ourselves. What I'm separated and disconnected from God or from others or from myself for any reason, whether it's something I've done, something I've failed to do, or something that's just happened to me because of someone else's choices, there is sin.

SLIDE Sin is separation between us and God, others, and ourselves.

When we get separated from God and from others and from

ourselves and try to do life on our own, it not only can be painful, but it can cause harm or damage to ourselves or others. When I was about 12 years old, we would go to Canada with my stepfather's family and take a seaplane from a lake to an area that was off grid and we would live off the land for two or three weeks at a time. It was always impressed on me how important it was to stay close because it would be easy to get lost in the Canadian wilderness that was uncharted. We were hiking from one leg to another, and they went off to use the restroom, and I remember having difficulty finding my way back. You can tell how happy I am to be in the wilderness in this photo. At least I had a sword.

GRAPHIC Jeff in Canada

I got separated from the group and I remember feeling pretty scared because I had never been in a situation like this before. If I got too far away from the group, I might even have to spend the night by myself or could be attacked by animals of which there were many in the Canadian wilderness. It was not good to be alone, and I often think about that moment and recognize there are moments when we all get off the path, and we get separated from God or others or even from ourselves in a way that can cause harm or damage. I remember panicking and yelling for help and luckily, I wasn't too far from the group. There was this relief I felt when I discovered our family again and I went from being anxious and scared to a sense of relief.

I think that's the kind of feeling we are meant to have when we have gotten off track in life and when we simply cry out that we need someone to save us. The idea of God coming in the flesh as Jesus to be our savior is meant to relieve us of that fear and anxiety when we get to places where we can't fix problems on our own. It is not something however that God will force on us, but we need to be willing to simply cry out and acknowledge that we need saving. When I got separated from my family in the wilderness, they all were looking for me as well, but I had to make an effort to cry out and be heard, or they could have walked right on by me. God doesn't force any of us to receive the gift of

salvation. God gives us freedom to receive his saving grace or to keep hiding from it.

SLIDE Sozo = to save, rescue, deliver, help, heal, preserve

The Greek word that Matthew uses to describe the Christ child is helpful. The idea is that Jesus comes looking for us to save us, rescue us, deliver us, help us, and provide healing. Sometimes we get separated because we decide to do life on our own and we get off track because of decisions that we have made in life. Sometimes we get separated by causing harm to others when we follow our selfish ambition or get consumed with pride. I like to remind us constantly that we all have done things we wish we hadn't done or said things we wish we hadn't said.

Sometimes we're not even sure why we made those decisions or how we got off track. I have met people going through difficult moments in life who have said to me something like, "I don't even know how I got here. How did he get this bad?" I found in my own life that this typically happens when I have wanted to be right and do my own thing. Let's be honest. All of us believe at some level that if people just do life the way we think they should do it then everything would work out much better for everyone. This selfishness gets a hold of us, and we become self-centered and as a result we get separated from God, others, and even our best selves.

I find it encouraging that the early church struggled with these same issues. The first document in your New Testament is Paul's letter to the Galatians which was written even before the gospels. He is writing to one of the first churches in the Roman Empire, which was a culture not too dissimilar to our own when it came to the reality that many wanted to do their own thing and force others to do what they wanted by manipulating them. They often saw people as objects instead of children of God and so Paul writes these words in the closing chapter of that letter, Galatians 6. These are some of my favorite words in scriptures and I often read them at funerals to remind the gathered community

that we are meant to care for others when we are going through grief or loss.

BIBLE

²Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. ³If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.

⁴Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else. ⁵For we are each responsible for our own conduct.

When I was lost in that Canadian wilderness, one of the things that saved me was something that my stepfather taught me which was to stop roaming around in a panic and simply sit so I wouldn't get myself more lost and people could find me. When I tried to fix this problem on my own, I only made matters worse. The key was to sit and wait for rescue because the others were going to be out looking. I did have to assume that they would notice I was missing and they did and one of the reasons they found me was because I stopped wandering because I would have gone even farther off track. Just after he says these words in Galatians 6, he follows them up with this which I find very helpful.

BIBLE

⁸Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.

The invitation from Paul is to allow ourselves to rest in the Holy Spirit and stop trying to fight. During this Christmas season, it's easy to get caught up in all the anxiety of shopping and getting everything done, but the invitation to salvation is about recognizing that we can't earn it and get it on our own. It's not something we can buy, but just a gift that we must receive by simply saying, "yes." The first step to experiencing

salvation and to receive the savior Jesus is simply pausing and waiting which is one of the things we do during this season of advent. This is meant to be a season of preparation and waiting which is why we light a new candle each week. Once we do that, we then have a better view of what is happening around us and how it is we might really experience the idea of sacrificial love this Christmas season. Paul finishes this section of scripture with these words in verses 9 and 10.

BIBLE

⁹ So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.

The key is to remember that we experienced salvation 1st and then we respond by doing what Jesus did when he became a man and served others sacrificially. When we recognize our need for salvation and then simply pause and receive that gift, then we have something to give. Salvation pushes us to respond. We can't help ourselves. But it starts with us pausing and receiving that gift first.

I was Talking with someone after a funeral recently where I had mentioned these five things we had to do to move through our grief: saying thank you, please forgive me for, I forgive you for, I love you, and goodbye. They were stuck on the forgiveness part and felt like they couldn't forgive this person for something and so they were stuck. They needed saving. I told them that the reason “please forgive me for” is first is because we have to do that first before we can offer forgiveness. They didn't believe they had done anything wrong to this person and that might have been true, but I simply asked if they had received forgiveness from God for things they couldn't fix or make better. It might not have anything to do with this other person but what I've learned is that we can't give what we haven't received.

SLIDE

We can't give what we have not received.

Part of this salvation idea is recognizing the truth that we all need forgiveness because until we receive it, we can't offer it. We all need grace, which is unmerited and undeserved love, because until we receive it it's hard to give it. Jesus came to fill us up so that we would have something to give and it begins with a relationship with him. This is why I remind people that sin is not about rules but about the damaged relationship. Rules might give us some guardrails which are important and can help us, but eventually it's the relationship that saves us.

SLIDE Relationship with Jesus is what saves us.

Jesus tells multiple stories about things that are lost and how people go looking for them. The woman looks for a lost coin, and the shepherd looks for lost sheep, and the parent looks for a lost child. The big idea is that God is the one who initiates salvation and Jesus is going to do the work for us, we just need to say yes. God comes in this infant child Jesus to restore the relationship so that we can experience salvation and new life.

This idea of salvation found in relationship is why the next name of Jesus given to him in Matthew's gospel is so important. We read these familiar words every Christmas season, but they change everything when it comes to what it means to have a God who came to be fully human and experience all that we have experienced.

BIBLE

²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

**She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means 'God is with us.'"**

Jesus is the physical and tangible presence of God in the world Who has come to be with us. So, there was another time when I got lost in the

Canadian wilderness and this time it was with my stepbrother John who was older and much bigger. We got lost and it actually seemed like fun because there were two of us. There's something powerful about remembering and knowing that we are not alone. Even when we saw the bear when we were lost it wasn't so bad because we were together. It was especially nice that John was much bigger and I was faster so I teased him that I could outrun the bear and it would take some time for it to finish him off.

GRAPHIC Jeff and John Stillman

This idea of God coming in the flesh changes everything when it comes to how we understand what it means to be fully human. We get to see a picture of who we could really be as we look at the life, ministry, suffering, and death, and resurrection of Jesus. Athanasius of Alexandria, who was a leader in the church in the early 300s, put it this way for us.

GRAPHIC God Became Man that Man Might Become God

God came in the person of Jesus so we might see who we could become. We are meant to become the very presence of God for other people which is why in this church we talk about being the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. This mission statement that we try to live by, which we are not perfect at by any means, is the picture God gives us when he comes as an infant Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

When I work with couples who are going to be married, we talk about the purpose of Christian marriage which is not to feel loving feelings all the time. If we think that the purpose of marriage is to always get our needs met by the other person, then we are turning them into an object, and I would suggest there is sin in our marriage because we no longer see that person as a child of God but as someone to be used. The purpose of Christian marriage is to help us become sanctified, which means to become more like Jesus.

SLIDE Sanctifying Grace

This idea of sanctification is at the heart of why Jesus came into the world, to show us what it means that God made us to love us and that that love might change us and shape us. It's in our relationship with God and with others that we learned to forgive and to love sacrificially. We see it in the person of Jesus who came to be with us and help us know we are not alone in this journey. This is why Jesus told us that people would know we are his followers not by how much we know or how much of the Bible we memorize, but by how we love each other. Our love for one another will prove to the world that we have been changed and sanctified and made new in Christ, saved by his grace.

We see in Jesus the truth that true power doesn't come by controlling others or manipulating them or turning them into objects. True power that changes the world comes in the form of an infant who is totally dependent. I was talking recently to a young couple who had their first child and the dad was overwhelmed as he held his child about the responsibility and the sense of love, he had for this infant that was totally dependent on him. He said as he looked into the eyes of this child, he realized that he would sacrifice anything for them. I think This is why God came in the person of Jesus as an infant, for us to recognize that God being with us means we are not alone and there is sacrificial love that will be given for us and will change the world.

This child is meant to make us feel something, not just know something. We are meant to feel how much God made us to love us. I found out this last week that our native hope ministry, which partners with the Navajo Nation to provide food for people and families off grid, has now taken on a boarding school. Children who live in northern New Mexico in extreme poverty come to school during the week but then they go home on the weekends and have no food for the entire weekend until they come back to school Monday. Our team is now putting together backpacks to send home with those kids and working with people in that community to be the presence of Jesus.

GRAPHICS Tohaali School 1 to 4

Tohaali School located is in the Newcomb area of New Mexico. Approximately 90 students attend school ages pre-K through 8th grade. One third of the children are residential, so they spend nights at school. Breakfast, lunch and snacks are provided to all students daily and residential children receive dinner as well.

Dee Dee Bitsilly is the school principal, and she is a dynamo follower of Jesus! She encourages multigenerational activities and runs the school like a community center. There is a strong presence of elders who participate in sewing and weaving classes. They offer instruction to students throughout the year. The budget for Tohaali is limited, so Native Hope donates food, books, and supplies monthly. There were two drives initiated by NH for bedding and coats in October and November. Loads of blankets, sleeping bags etc. were collected for the community and brought to the school as part of our monthly delivery in October. Over 100 coats and winter gear were brought to Tohaali in November.

The staff at Tohaali School is welcoming and supportive of our efforts, often helping with the shelving and distribution of items. Bags of food are packed every Friday for the children to take home with the can goods NH members bring each month. These items supplement what the school has access to and enhances the bags with nutritious food. Dozens of books have been collected and are given to students and placed in the library. Every student gets a new book on their birthday!

The invitation this Christmas season for us is to remember this name Emmanuel, which means God's with us, which means we go to those places and be the presence of God and show up. We are invited to be the answer to people's prayers just as Jesus is the answer to our prayers when we feel alone or we wonder what will happen to us at our death. We are meant to be God's hope and gods present, God's love and God's answer to hunger.

I don't know if there have been times in your life, or maybe you're

going through one right now, where you feel overwhelmed and scared and you're not sure how you're going to make it through to the next day. We sometimes feel lonely and isolated when we're struggling and we are tempted to retreat into ourselves. Yet what we need most in that moment is God and others. Part of calling this child Emmanuel is recognizing that we need God and we need the physical presence of God.

A Gallup poll from early 2025 found 30% of U.S. adults felt lonely “a lot of the day yesterday.” High-Risk Groups include:

- Ages 13 to 29 where almost 60% reported serious loneliness in one study, with high daily/weekly rates in others.
- 65% of caregivers (especially younger ones) report loneliness due to stress and lack of time.
- Those earning under \$30k/year are lonelier (29%) than higher earners.
- People in fair/poor health (59%) and with mental health conditions (58%) are more likely to be lonely.

The American Psychiatric Association calls loneliness a public health epidemic, with significant impacts on heart health and well-being. Underlying factors which contribute to this widespread feeling of disconnection were found to be:

- Digital isolation
- Lack of community
- High workloads
- Economic pressures.

There's a wonderful Christmas book which I read as a child and has now become a movie that you may have heard of called, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. The movie was released last Christmas, and I loved it as it really asks us this question about what it means that God came in the flesh to be Emmanuel. That name Emmanuel even shows up in the trailer so let's take a look as you'll get a pretty good idea of why this is such a classic story of Christmas.

VIDEO The Best Christmas Pageant Ever Trailer

You can tell the main idea through that trailer where the Herdman's show up, and it seems like they're going to ruin Christmas with their antics and irreverent take on the Christmas story. We learn there's something profound and tragic going on under their family story and we see they need Emmanuel, God with us, as much if not more than anyone else in this story. The kids in the Herdman family in this story remind me of the statistics about loneliness and isolation often because they are caregivers or don't have the resources that others have this time of year. One of my favorite moments in the story is when Imogene comes face to face with Mary and the role she is going to play in the pageant.

The Herdman's have never heard the story of Jesus and so rehearsals have been irreverent and messy to put it nicely. The director Grace talks with Imogene about Mary and Jesus and if she REALLY wants a part in this story. Let's take a look.

VIDEO Imogene and Mary

I love her determination and think that probably is more like Mary than some sweet, idealist young woman. In many ways the story of Christmas is for people like the Herdman's who feel left out and unwanted and despised. The director Grace begins to see that Christmas is more than just a beautiful scene but it's a profound opportunity to experience salvation and God with us, all of us. The pageant gives Imogene and her family a chance to say yes, even if it's not the way that many of us picture it going.

I don't want to ruin it for you, so I hope you read the book or watch the movie this Christmas season because it really does give a much better picture of what it means to remember that God came to be one of us. The point of the Christmas glory is that God came and was born to peasants in the 1st century in a parking garage for animals to help everyone know that God is with us. It's not about how we look or how much money we make or if we fit the right mold for what it means to be

a Christian. Following Jesus begins with recognizing our need for salvation and for something more and then understanding that after we are saved, we are saved for something more.

My prayer this season is that you might look for ways that God would meet you in a person or someone that has come across your path. The names of Jesus remind us that we are invited to not only experience salvation but then be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world, knowing that we can change the world into the Kingdom of God. That's why we sing on Christmas and that's why we gather on Christmas Eve.

GRAPHIC Christmas Invite Cards

I want to challenge you to think of someone that may have come across your path in the last few weeks and whom you might invite to worship Christmas Eve. It may be somewhat unexpected, or it may be someone that has been in your sphere of influence for a while. What we know is that the purpose of Christmas is to remember that this child has two names and each of them is meant to be a gift to us. They each speak to us about how God made us to love us and my guess is that there is some one that has come across your path that needs to hear that message this season. I pray you might pray for them now as we close our time together.

You might start with something simple like this...

SLIDE Prayer

Jesus, Savior, Emmanuel, Thank you for your gift of salvation this Christmas. Helped me to say "yes." I receive you this Christmas as savior because I need what you have to offer.

May I experience you this Christmas as Emmanuel, knowing that you are with me always.

Help me to see someone in my life who needs to hear the Christmas story this year. Today I pray for _____. Provide a space and place for

me to invite them into your story this week.

Gracious God I pray for everyone who is part of worship today that we might experience your salvation and your gift of grace as we receive Jesus as savior, forgiving us, healing us, delivering us from the world and from ourselves. May his birth reconnect us to you so we might have a relationship that would carry us through this life and into a life forever with you. May we experience you in a very physical way as Emmanuel, God with us, this Christmas season. We pray these things in the names of Jesus, Amen.

December 20-21 Order

1. David welcomes people.
2. Song: "Joy to the World"
3. Song: "Angels We Have Heard on High"
4. Prayer by Praise Team member.
5. Jeff welcomes people:

- a. QR Code and Connect Card
 - b. Invite people to greet each other, however comfortable and be seated.
- 6. Jeff introduces Advent Candle lighting
 - a. Advent Candle Lighting
- 7. Sermon
 - a. Bumper
 - b. Sermon
 - c. Prayer
- 8. **Meditation Moments**
- 9. Offering (Helped two families this week)
 - a. Christmas Offering
- 10. Song: “O Come All Ye Faithful”
- 11. Caring Ministers
- 12. Welcome Center
- 13. Christmas Invites
 - a. Christmas Eve Service times
 - b. Come to service OTHER than 5
- 14. Christmas Day ONLINE
- 15. Weekend after Christmas ONLINE
- 16. Closing Prayer