

DECEMBER 23 ~ FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

READINGS: Matthew 1:8-25; Romans 1: 1-7 Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7,17-19

ALL-AGE TALK

My granny was furious. All that my granddad had been asked to do was to register my mother's birth at the Registrar's Office in Larbert and to give her name as Elizabeth Wilkie – plain, pure and simple. However, when my granddad returned home and the birth certificate was examined, the name on the birth certificate wasn't Elizabeth Wilkie but Elizabeth Blatchford Wilkie. "Where in heaven's name did you get Blatchford from?" my granny asked. "There's no Blatchford in the family." "He's a fine trade unionist," was my granddad's reply. I wonder how you got your name?

It is still common in many countries for parents to name their children because of the meaning a name has, and what it tells us about the person to whom it is given. This was very much the case at the time of Jesus' birth. So if we want to explore who the Christ-child really is we need to know the meaning of the names and titles he was given. *Slide with four names/titles.*

Let's begin with the name 'Jesus' which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Joshua'. *'Jesus' slide.* Does anyone remember from one of the readings what 'Jesus' means? It means 'the Lord saves'. According to the angel who appeared to Joseph, Jesus' name meant that he would save his people from their sins.

Our second name isn't so much a name as a title – *'Messiah' slide.* Are there any suggestions as to its meaning and so what it says about who Jesus is. 'Messiah' is a Hebrew word meaning 'Anointed One', One 'chosen' or 'set apart' by God for a special task; and through time it came to refer to the King God promised to send, a King who would be chosen and set apart to preach the Message of good news to the poor, to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, and to announce, "This is God's year to act!", a King who would scatter the bluffing braggarts, knock tyrants off their high horses, and leave the callous rich out in the cold, a King who would lift up the oppressed and sit the starving poor sat down to a banquet, a King who would base his power on right and justice.

Our next title is ‘Christ’ – *‘Christ’ slide* – which is the Greek word for ‘Messiah’, the promised King who would base his power on right and justice and have a bias to the poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed. Like ‘Messiah’, ‘Christ’ is a title given to Jesus; it is not his surname!

Our final title is ‘Immanuel’ – *‘Immanuel’ slide* – a Hebrew word that means ‘God with us’. ‘Immanuel’ all about God coming down into the muddle and mess of real life, all about God moving into our neighbourhood, all about God becoming flesh and blood.

So today’s Bible readings all point to the baby born at Bethlehem to be the specially chosen one Wow! (*recap ‘Messiah’ slide, then ‘Christ’ slide*) in whom God would live with his people on earth Wow! (*recap ‘Immanuel’ slide*) and who would save his people Wow! (*recap ‘Jesus’ slide*).

IMAGES OF JESUS

We’re going to see eight images of Jesus from artists, TV producers, forensic scientists and others who are giving us **THEIR** ideas about who Jesus is and what he is like. *Slides*. So which images did you particularly like? Why was that? Were there any you disliked? Were there any that particularly resonate with you?

Christians believe that it is only as we read or listen to the message of the Bible and really become excited and inspired by it as we pray, live and work each day that we can discover who Jesus truly is. Today’s service will help us explore what the Bible says about the Christ-child, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

