

The Rescuing Power of Jesus
Luke 2:21-35

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After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Lk. 2:21

Our theme for these Sundays between Christmas and the beginning of Lent is dealing with this Jesus who has been sent to us and learning how to incorporate him into our lives. Mary is our guide in this work, for she – along with Joseph, of course – was the first person who had to deal with Jesus and figure out how to incorporate him into her life. So the texts for this set of sermons are all ones in which Mary and Jesus appear together in some form of interaction.

Mary is present in today's text only indirectly, but the passage shows her dealing with Jesus, incorporating him into her life, by naming him Savior. That is one way to translate the name Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, and it means *Savior* or *God saves*.

Mary and Joseph name their baby Savior out of obedience and as an act of faith. It is an act of obedience because Jesus is the name given by the angel before Jesus was born. They named him Savior out of faith because as yet – only eight days old – Jesus hadn't done anything to save anybody from anything.

This brings us to our day at the start of 2020. We can name Jesus the Savior for our time. We have an advantage over Mary and Joseph, for we know more than they knew at this point of the story. We can look at the whole of Jesus' life and see his rescuing power.

There is rescuing power in the Cross of Jesus.

How the Cross saves is a mystery none can fully comprehend. There are a number of images used in the Bible that have over the Christian years given rise to theories of the atonement, all in an attempt to explain what happened at Calvary. There are images drawn from the realm of Old Testament worship, and these speak of sacrifice and blood. There are images drawn from the realm of law, and these speak of guilt and judgment and a penalty that is paid. There are images drawn from the realm of economics, and these speak of a price paid, a ransom, and a redeeming. There are images drawn from the realm of warfare, and these speak of a battle and the defeat of the reigning power of sin. I confess I do not know which of any of these to give special credence above the others.

But I do confess something happened at Calvary. When Matthew sought to explain it, he said that the ornate curtain of the temple, the large, thick, and heavy curtain separating the people's part of the temple from God's part – the holy of holies - was torn in two from top to bottom, ripping forever the dividing line between heaven and earth (Mt. 27:51). Whether that happened literally or is a figurative device, I do not know. But I do know that because of Jesus

there is no condemnation that can separate us from the love of God. There is no guilt that is too guilty; there is no shame that is too shameful; there is no distance too great to be crossed and overcome. There is effective rescuing power in the Cross, and so we can name Jesus Savior.

There is rescuing power in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Was it last Sunday that the Packers won on a field goal that sailed over the upright after time had expired? Such was the surprising victory of Jesus. Eight days after he was born, he was named Savior. We can name him Savior because three days after he died he rose again. His time on earth had expired, but he defeated death and achieved victory.

He gives us the victory. He won it and we shall get to enjoy it. The open door of his empty tomb opens the door of heaven. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also" (see John 14:11-3). Because of Jesus, we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Ps. 23:6). Because he lives, we shall live also (Jn. 14:19). Because of Jesus and his Resurrection, death has lost its sting and the grave its victory (cf. 1 Cor. 15:55).

There is effective rescuing power in the Resurrection, and so we can name Jesus Savior.

There is rescuing power in the teaching of Jesus.

This may be of particular help. Some of you may be wondering about now. What about the crises we face today? The Cross deals with sins of the past. The Resurrection tells of glory in the future. But what about the needs of this present hour? Is there rescuing power in Jesus for today? Yes, and it can come by way of his teaching.

Jesus himself said of his teaching that putting it into practice is like building your house on firm foundation. Build your house on this firm foundation and it will be able to withstand any storm that may blow against it (Mt. 7:24). A sampling of his teaching shows how it has help for the crises of our times.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt. 5:9). O! If we could take that yoke upon us and learn from him! We would find there is a better way than the way of war and the way of violence. We would find that the hope of the world is not in stockpiling weapons or in standing up armies but in showing the kind of compassion that strengthens others and weakens their resolve to do wrong.

Jesus said, "Love one another" (Jn. 15:12). O! If we could take that yoke upon us and learn from him! We would find there is a better way than racist divisions and the hatred of others. We would find that the strength of society is found not in the wealth of a few or even in the rule of the majority but in neighborliness toward all.

Jesus advocated that we practice forgiveness (Mt. 6:14). O! If we could take that yoke upon us and learn from him! We would find that there is a better way than harboring resentment

and holding grudges. We would find that the path to energy, freedom, life, and joy all pass through forgiveness.

There is effective rescuing power in the teaching of Jesus. If we look to him, he can lead us to a better world.

Mary and Joseph dealt with Jesus by naming him Savior in obedience to the angels – it may have been the same angel – who appeared to them.

I've tried to say today that Jesus lived up to his name and showed saving power by way of his Cross, by way of his Resurrection, and by way of his teaching.

Only one thing remains to be said, and that by way of the old Sunday School song:
I took Jesus as my Savior,
You take him, too.