

Who is this Jesus?

A look at the names given to him around the time of his birth.

Son of God (Luke 1:35)

Those who are genuine followers of the God of the Bible are described as being "sons" (and "daughters") of God. This is the result of being "adopted" into the "family of God." (Ephesians 1:5: "He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...") In contrast, Jesus is described as being the Son of God because of his unique, eternal nature. In a special way, he is the "only begotten," the unique or "one and only" Son of God. (1 John 4:9 "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.")

Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32)

This relationship as "Son" is with the "Most High God" - specifically the God who is revealed to us in the Bible.

The Word (John 1:1, 14)

This name is mentioned in the Bible as describing Jesus before he was born! We - finite humans - cannot fully comprehend the nature of the infinite God. But we can accept the things he has revealed to us about himself. Jesus, as the Word of God is revealed to us as being very truly a part of God himself, yet in some manner distinct from him. (John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.") Elsewhere, he is described as "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." (Hebrews 1:3)

Immanuel (Matthew 1:22-23)

This means "God with us." This name comes right out of Old Testament prophecy, which described this event (the birth of Jesus) with exacting detail. It is because of his unique nature that he is qualified to bear this name in its fullest sense. (John 1:14 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.")

Jesus (Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:21)

Because he is "Immanuel," he bears the right to own the name "Jesus" in the fullest sense of its meaning: "Jehovah saves." ("Jehovah" is the name of God in the Old Testament.)

Christ (Matthew 1:17-18; Luke 2:11,26)

"The anointed one" or "the Messiah." He came with a mission - a special task to be completed. His birth was no accident.

Savior (Luke 2:11)

"Deliverer." The Bible describes mankind as alienated from God. God, by nature, is too holy and pure to tolerate sin; eventually he must deal with it. Yet because he is also the God of mercy and love, he has provided a way for reconciliation. This was Jesus' mission - this is why he was born. Elsewhere he is called "the lamb of God" (John 1:29) because he would one day take upon himself (on the cross) the judgment we deserve. Like a sacrificial lamb, he would take our place (the place of each of us who trusts him for salvation) and experience the wrath of God that we deserve. He is also described as "the horn of salvation" for the Jews (Luke 1:69 - "Horn" symbolized "strength." Jesus would have the power to save.) and "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32 - that includes the rest of us who are not Jews).

The King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2)

He is also described as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). This points to his right to rule over Israel. All the Old Testament prophecies concerning a future king over Israel will someday be fulfilled in him. (See Matthew 2:6.) Other passages describe him as the one who will be king over all the nations.

A Nazarene (Matthew 2:23)

Though born in Bethlehem (in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy), he would grow up in the town of Nazareth. In a sense, this is a play on words. The town of Nazareth was the location of a Roman garrison. Since the Jews looked at the Romans as their enemies, the term "Nazarene" became a term of contempt. (Compare with John 1:46, when Nathanael - soon to become a disciple of Jesus - said: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?") Jesus would live as a despised "nobody." One of the Old Testament prophets described him in this manner: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3) In reality, however, he was something else:

Lord (Luke 1:43, 2:11)

He is not merely a "human" lord, or master. He is not just the leader of those who choose to become his disciples or followers. He is ruler over all. Quite frequently this word "Lord" is used in the New Testament in a manner which ties (or equates) Jesus with the God of the Old Testament. But why should we be surprised? He is the Creator of the universe.

Though once viewed as a "nobody," the day will come in which we will all bow down before him. He is the one who: "Although he was in very nature God, he did not cling to his right to be treated as equal with God. Instead, he made himself nothing. He chose to take on the very nature of a slave, and was born as a human being. Considered by others to be merely human, he lowered himself even further by being obedient to the point of death, death on a cross! Because of this, God has exalted him to the highest place and given him the name of honor that is greater than any other name, so that at the name of Jesus, everyone will kneel, everyone in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. And everyone will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glorious praise of God the Father." (Philippians 2:6-11)