



FOCUS ON FAITH

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Some people have a strange sense of humour when it comes to giving their children names.

A couple my wife and I once knew always said they'd call their children (if they ever had any) Sidney and Pearl – their surname was Harber! The consultancy company I work for was originally founded by a member of the Coutts banking dynasty – Percival Coutts – which when you abbreviate the name becomes Percy Coutts (persecutes)!

I'm sure you've probably come across other examples – for instance, Bob Geldof and Paula Yates calling their 3 daughters, Fifi Trixibelle, Peaches and Pixie or the guy who gave his son the names of all the Liverpool players who won the European Cup. That probably wasn't so bad in the days when the majority of the team were of British descent but now with so many players coming from other countries it could be very confusing. And fancy having 11 forenames – especially when having to fill out an application for a driving licence!

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Probably most of us grew up with nicknames – some complimentary and others possibly not. Children can be cruel at times in what they say and I can remember some of the ways my old school mates were hurt by the names they were called in their formative years. Johnny Cash's iconic song, "A Boy Named Sue", graphically illustrates how the name given to someone at birth can affect them – read the lyrics sometime.

But there is a positive side too.

I caught a short piece on TV the other night though where one community in the Scottish Islands can easily trace their heritage and history. Their tradition is to give the sons all the names of their fathers so by speaking out his name, this guy could trace his family line right back to the 14th Century and so recall previous generations.

When our two children came along we wanted to give them names which reflected something of what we were hoping they would turn out to be like. We also had the opportunity to commemorate our parents in that, because on both sides our fathers and mothers had the same forename, we were able

to incorporate them as second names for our children.

Throughout the Bible we see that the names given to people actually reflect the way they turned out. Adam actually means 'red earth' or 'ruddy' as in complexion – significant because the Bible tells us that as the first human being God created him out of the 'dust of the earth'. Abraham means 'father of many' and the Bible recalls God's promise that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Other Biblical characters had names which in a sense foretold their future.

And did you know there are well over one hundred different names, titles and appellations given to Jesus? In the Old Testament he is referred to as the 'mighty God', a 'wonderful counsellor, and 'the prince of peace'. Joseph who became his adopted dad was told to call him Jesus because 'he would save his people from their sins'. The root meaning of Jesus is 'to save'. At Christmas time we often sing carols with the name of Immanuel (or Emmanuel) which means 'God with us'.

For me that's the great truth of Christmas and the reason why the Christian faith is so life changing. God came to us rather than us having to strive to get to him. Christians believe in a God who not only says he loves us but demonstrated it in the most amazing way – miraculously born in humble circumstances, willing to become one of us. Jesus didn't have a privileged background and he wasn't exempt from all the trials and tribulations of life. Imagine him having to grow up with the stigma of illegitimacy over his head. Ultimately he was betrayed, accused of fictitious charges, rejected, physically abused and then tortured to death. But thankfully that wasn't the end of the story.

From a baby in a manger to a death-defeating saviour and it's all in his name – Jesus. This Christmas why not spend a few moments considering that God can be with you – not just over the festive period but for ever?

The Christian Churches in the Bridgnorth area welcome you to their services over the Christmas period – see the advert elsewhere in the paper. Or log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk which provides information on local Churches together with contact details, plus other Christian resources and activities.