**Christmas at COMMUNITY ­– 2018**

**Big Idea:** “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” -Matthew 1:21

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**Introduction: Names**

(Graphic that says “Merry Christmas!”) Merry Christmas!

My name is Dave.

The person singing? His name is Lucas.

The person speaking earlier? His name is Ian.

Before we get started, I want you to find a couple people near you and wish them a “Merry Christmas,” but also learn their names. Make sure you learn their names. Go ahead and do that right now.

*(Pause while people mingle)*

A name is a very important part of a person’s identity. Yet, there are some names that are rather unfortunate. For example, I went to school with a guy whose name was **Fred Failing**. How do you think he did in high school? He dropped out. True story.

Did you know there are actually some names that are banned by governments? For example…

* You’re not allowed to name your child “**Monkey**” in Denmark. Evidently someone tried.
* In France, a couple wanted to name their child “**Nutella**” …which if you’ve ever had Nutella, you’ll immediately know why. That stuff is awesome! But a French judge shot it down.
* And this name was rejected by the Swedish government: “**BRFXXCCXXMNPCCCCLLLMMNPRXVCLMNCKSSQLBB11116**” No kidding! And the best part is that the parents insisted that the name is pronounced, “Albin!”

The reason some names are rejected is because we all know that names are powerful! With each of my kids, we chose names for a specific reason:

* My daughter is named “Amy” because it means “Beloved.” I wanted her name to remind her that she is loved!
* And my two sons, “Joshua” and “Caleb” were named after two courageous, Godly leaders in the Bible.

Names are important!

Today we are here because it’s Christmas, and on this day, we celebrate that a baby was born. This child was God becoming human, and he was given the name “**Jesus”**. Yet, I’m not sure if you know, that isn’t his only name…

**I AM**

Many centuries before the birth of Jesus, God first revealed his name to a man named Moses. Moses’s story is part crazy and part amazing. Moses was born during a time when the Israelites, the people of God, were enslaved by the Egyptians.

In a crazy plot twist, baby Moses ends up being raised in Pharaoh’s palace by Pharaoh’s own daughter. But over time, Moses learns that he’s actually not an Egyptian, but an Israelite. His heart breaks for his own enslaved people so one day when he sees an Egyptian beating a slave, in a fit of rage, Moses ends up killing the Egyptian.

As a result, he becomes a fugitive and spends the next 40 years living in obscurity in the wilderness.

It’s here, in the middle of nowhere, that God appears to Moses in a burning bush and tells Moses that he’s going to use him to rescue the people of God from slavery.

Yet, Moses is not so sure. Remember, at this point in his life, it seems Moses has lost everything.

* He thought he was royalty; but discovers he’s a slave.
* He’d been living in a palace; now he’s wandering in the wilderness.
* He was a prince; now he’s a murderer.

Moses shakes his head in disbelief thinking, “I’m too messed up. There’s no way God could use me to do that!” So he responds to God saying,

**“Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”** **–Exodus 3:13**

I wonder if there was some snarky-ness in Moses’s voice: *(more nasal)* “*Then what shall I tell them?”*

Yet, God doesn’t back down. He answers Moses’ question, and for the first time reveals his name:

**“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: “I AM has sent me to you.”’”** **–Exodus 3:14**

In English we write this name **“I AM”** as *(add these three)* **“Yahweh”** or **“Jehovah”** or **“the LORD”**. This is the name God would use to describe himself more than 6000 times in the Old Testament alone. You could argue that this name is very unusual. In fact, it’s not really a name at all. It’s a verb.

Understand, Moses lacked confidence telling God: “I can’t do what you ask, because I am NOT… I’m NOT eloquent enough. I’m NOT smart enough. I’m NOT good enough.”

But God says, “I didn’t choose you because you were any of those things. I AM enough of those things for the both of us. I AM, and my “am-ness,” overcomes your “not-ness.”

Through this name, God was revealing to Moses that whatever Moses was not because of his sinfulness and brokenness and weakness, God would be for him and through him.

“I AM” becomes the name by which God relates to broken and needy people. As we read stories in the Old Testament, whenever God’s people were in a time of need, God would reveal himself with this name... “I AM.”

When the people were lacking, God said… *(Possibly build as a list)*

**I AM your Provider - Genesis 22:14**

When they were sick, God said…

**I AM your Healer - Exodus 15:26**

When they were afraid, God said…

**I AM your Peace - Judges 6:24**

When they needed rest, God said…

**I AM your Shepherd - Psalm 23:1**

When they were attacked, God said…

**I AM your Defender - Isaiah 48:17**

When they were oppressed, God said…

**I AM your Righteousness - Jeremiah 23:6**

When they felt alone, God said…

**I AM Present - Ezekiel 48:35**

Whatever they were NOT, whatever they were lacking, God was their great “I AM.”

**Jesus, the I AM**

But here is the question: Who is God for us today? This Christmas? In 2018?

2000 years ago, the great “I AM” entered our world as a baby, and he is introduced to us this way:

**“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** **-Matthew 1:21**

In Hebrew, **“Jesus”** literally means, **“I AM your salvation.”** Jesus’ very name is a reminder that no matter where I find myself, no matter what hard seasons I go through, Jesus is my salvation.

Jesus’ “am-ness” overcomes our “not-ness.” For all that we lack and for all we could never be for ourselves, Jesus is the great “I AM!”

To those who hunger for something more, Jesus says, *(Possibly build as a list)*

**I AM the bread of life - John 6:35**

To those who thirst for greater purpose, Jesus says,

**I AM the living water - John 7:38–39**

To those stumbling in darkness, Jesus declares,

**I AM the light - John 8:12**

To those who need a fresh start, Jesus proclaims,

**I AM the door - John 10:9**

To those who feel abandoned, Jesus whispers,

**I AM the Good Shepherd - John 10:11**

To those who feel lost, Jesus declares,

**I AM the way - John 14:6**

To those confused, Jesus says,

**I AM the truth.** **- John 14:6**

To those afraid of death, Jesus declares,

**I AM the life - John 14:6**

**The “I AM” for Us**

This Christmas, we gather here to celebrate Jesus, the great “I AM,” but we also bring with us our unique insecurities and brokenness, our doubts and our fears, our challenges and our disappointments.

* Maybe you feel stuck in your **career** and think, “Who could change this?”
* Maybe your **marriage** is strained and you’re wondering, “Who could fix this?”
* You may be full of worry about **financial challenges** and think, “Who can save this?”
* You may be here today with a **broken heart** asking, “Who could restore this?”
* Perhaps you’ve been battling **anxiety** or **depression** and think, “Who could change this?”
* Perhaps you’ve been suffering with a **physical illness** and wonder, “Who could heal this?”

*(Short personal disclosure)* I am here today experiencing my first Christmas without my beloved grandmother. I know you might be thinking, “Dave, you’re old enough to be a grandparent, you still had a grandma?” OK, first of all… ouch. ☺ But yes, we lost my grandmother this year, and I carry that loss into this Christmas.

Everyone of us brings our unique struggles, setbacks, or sadness into this Christmas season, but today I want you to know that Jesus is God come to earth to be our Savior, to be our great **“I AM”**.

So if you are sitting there right now thinking…

* Who could be smart enough to figure out my life? Jesus says, “I AM.”
* I’m not really sure who is on my side. Jesus says, “I AM.”
* Nobody’s listening to me. Jesus says…*(point to audience)* say it with me… “I AM.”
* I’m not strong enough to keep going. He says…*(keep pointing to audience for response)* “I AM.”
* Who is even aware of what I’m going through? Jesus says… “I AM.”
* I’m not clear what the future holds. “I AM.”
* I’m incapable of a fresh start… “I AM.”
* What if I’m just not good enough?… “I AM.”

For all that we lack, for all we can never be, Jesus is the great “I AM!”

**VIDEO – Testimony Video**

This Christmas, Jesus, the Savior of the world, wants to be your great “I AM.”

Maybe you never knew that God longs for a close, personal relationship with you. Maybe you never understood that he wants to walk with you through your days to be your help, your guide, and your hope. Today can be the day you find your way back to God. Today can be the day you invite Jesus to be your great “I AM.”

Or maybe you need to find your way back to God again. Though you know him, you’ve been trying to live life in your own strength…and you’re exhausted. Today, whatever you are lacking, whatever you are not, Jesus wants to be *for* you. He wants to be your great “I AM.”

This Christmas, may we all remember that 2000 years ago, a baby was born in Bethlehem. He is Immanuel, God with us. May Christmas remind every one of us that through Jesus God declares… **“I AM…HERE.”**