This week’s reading assignment: Matthew 1-2

Names are very important in the Bible. When the angel tells Joseph that the child’s name will be “Jesus,” this tells us something very significant about who this child is and what his mission will be about.

As many of you know, the name “Jesus” is exactly the same as the name “Joshua” from the Old Testament. Jesus = Joshua. And the name Joshua is not just any name – is a super-charged and legendary name from Israel’s history. Joshua was the leader of the people after Moses died, and Joshua had a unique role that he was best known for… he led the people into the Promised Land. So when this child is called Yeshua – Joshua – Jesus – the connotation is that this child will have something to do with leading the people into a Promised Land.

To reinforce this point, notice how Matthew includes the story of the baby Jesus coming up out of Egypt! We are meant to read this entire story in the light of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. We’re being told that something THAT BIG is happening with Jesus…and even bigger.

How is Jesus different from the first Joshua? The angel also tells Joseph one more amazing fact about this child. He is to be called Immanuel, God with us. This child is will be no ordinary leader of the people. This child is God himself, and the kind of Promised Land that he will deliver is bigger and better than anything the people would imagine.

The mission of Jesus is about nothing less than opening the way to the greatest hope of the whole creation...the kingdom of God, come to earth.

Reflection Questions:

1) Matthew begins this book in a strange way – with a genealogy. A family tree. Why do you think he gives the genealogy of Jesus? And why does he start with Abraham at the beginning?

2) When Jesus is born, chapter 2 tells us that leaders from a far away country came to see the child. What is the significance of this? Why does Matthew want to include people from other nations in this story about “the king of the Jews”?

3) Read about Herod’s response to the birth of Jesus. It is swift and violent – almost panicky. The author wants us to see from the very beginning that the powers of the world are threatened by this child. What was Herod afraid of? Was he justified in his fear?