

So here's the thing you need to know about my Dad. He is pure and simply, straight-up, no questions asked, a hard rock guy. I grew up in a house that was filled with the combination of my mom's golden oldies hits and my dad's heavy duty rock 'n roll. Still to this day, this is the music my dad listens to. He has not toned it down or turned it down as he has gotten older. We walk into his house at Christmas and his music is playing and it isn't subtle, it's *present*, and it is something that he has instilled in all of us, because he has raised three girls who live in the belief that if it isn't loud, it isn't worth playing.

Now, why do you need to know this? You need to know this because my dad's hard rock affinity caused a little bit of a kerfuffle when I was born and was in the process of being named. I've told the story before that I was supposed to be an Ashleigh or a Nicole, but since I was born my lil tiny self, I became Tina. My dad saw my name change as the prime opportunity to do something awesome with my initials. If you didn't know, my maiden name is Toburen, so I needed a middle name that flowed well between two tees. Now, again, remember, my dad loves hard rock...he particularly loves AC/DC, so when the question arose about what my middle name should be, he had the brilliant idea that since they had been considering Nicole for my first name, why not shift it to my middle name so that my initials could be,

yes indeed, TNT, as in dynamite, as in an AC/DC song. Now for those of you who already know my middle name, you're already figuring out that my dad did not win this debate. The mythology of my family says that my mom refused to have a kid named after an AC/DC song, and thus, I am not Tina Nicole, but Tina Marie, which I have to admit has a better ring to it, and for a parent has a far better flow when needing to yell at your kid with full middle name fervor.

Here's the thing though...the lingering aura of that story never left me. Don't get me wrong, I have always loved my name. I love the cuteness that my parents named me Tina because I was small, and I very much have embraced that story as part of my identity. It does not matter that I am the tallest of my parents' kids, I will always be the youngest, the tiniest.

However, when I was in school, particularly when I was in sports, the whole TNT story got around, and it stuck a bit. This was especially true when I was playing softball. Not to toot my own horn, but I was a good softball player, and I could hit...to the point that my friends started calling me TNT anytime I hit a home run, because it was...dynamite. This continues today in different ways. When I was at Kairos this summer, and Garrett playfully tried to steal my job by doing his best preacher impersonation, when I went to reclaim that job when I preached the next night, I came out to AC/DC's

“TNT,” because I’ve always said it would be my walk up song if I were a baseball player. Who I am...will always be tiny, little, Tina Marie, but what I do, how I aim to live and be, well...there’s a lot of that TNT in there.

I started thinking about this in earnest this week as I left Bible study after we had had a rousing, but decidedly inconclusive discussion about the fact that when it comes to Jesus’ name...our lessons are a bit...confusing, which I would guess some of you have picked up on, and are possibly wondering the exact same thing that we all were. Now, before we get into it, let me state unequivocally, as I did in Bible study, that I have no answer for this particular quandary. But thanks to our discussion I now have a bit of a theory, it doesn’t mean it’s right, it’s just a new way for my brain to think about something that is a bit confusing...this dichotomy between Jesus and Emmanuel...between the two names Jesus has been given today.

One of the defining characteristics of Matthew’s gospel is that Matthew is *all about* Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. He’s writing to a community of Jewish Christians who are trying to reconcile their old faith with their new, trying to figure out the two blend together, what their belief in Jesus says when seen in light of their ardent belief in scripture. So Matthew loads up his gospel with as many Old Testament references as he can, and our gospel today is the very first one of

his gospel. In relating the story of Joseph's conversation with the angel, Matthew connects the angel giving Joseph the vital job of naming Jesus with the prophecy from Isaiah which indicates that a young woman, or a virgin, will bear a son and he will be named Emmanuel. Now...for those of you paying attention, the angel didn't tell Joseph, "And you are to name him Emmanuel." The angel says, "And you are to name him Jesus." I don't know about you, but at least to me, those aren't the same thing...so what do we do with this, because Matthew clearly says that this took place to fulfill the prophecy...yet we're dealing with two different names, and I wonder if the answer lies somewhere within the difference between what we are named and who we are called to be, who we are versus who people see us as, who we are versus what we will do with our lives. The difference between Tina and TNT, dynamite.

Lucky for us, both of the names indicated in our text are given meaning, we're told what they're supposed to represent and I think that might help us wade through the confusion a little bit. Let's start with the name the angel gives Joseph, the one we all know, because it's well, *the name*. Jesus. It's not an uncommon name in Ancient Israel at the time. It would have been as common as our modern day Joshua. It's not especially unique, it wouldn't distinguish Jesus from the crowd, but it's the name the

angel gives because it says something about *who* this child will be. Just as we pick out names sometimes based on their meaning, like how my nephew is Felix because it means “lucky,” Jesus is given a name that represents who he will be. He will be the Savior, the one who will save people from their sins. He will be exactly who John the Baptist declares him to be when he foretells his coming on the banks of the Jordan, the one people will turn to in repentance. He will be exactly who we anticipate praying, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing,” on the cross. He will be salvation. He will be the Messiah. He will save us from ourselves. That is *who* Jesus is. But what about *what* Jesus will do? What he will *represent*? I think that is where the second name comes in.

“They shall name him Emmanuel which means, ‘God is with us.’” That is what Jesus will represent for us, the living embodiment of God on earth, the flesh and blood human presence of God with God’s people. It’s almost like Jesus is his job title, Savior, and Emmanuel is the job expectations, be God with them. Jesus’ coming into the world as Emmanuel is a sounding cry to all the world that God is no longer dwelling in some far off place or dwelling in some cordoned off part of the Temple, but literally dwelling *with* us, breaking bread, praying, being *present, here*. It’s almost

like Jesus is the conceptual idea of who Jesus is, he's the Savior, and Emmanuel is the on the ground *feeling* of who Jesus is, he's God with us.

Now, why does this matter aside from the quirky interest of why scripture sounds the way it does and why it's sometimes confusing? It matters because this is who we are preparing for, this is who in seven days time we will have welcomed into the world, not some generic baby who bears a name like any other, but a baby who bears names that have a direct impact on our very lives and beings. Think about what these names mean for you, for you right in this very moment.

Jesus is coming into the world. Jesus your Savior. Jesus the one who will save you from your sins. All those things you confessed to God at the beginning of the service? Those are why Jesus bears that name he does, because he takes all of those sins and says, they aren't what are going to define you. He wipes them clean and says I forgive you, get out there and try again in this kingdom of mine. Jesus is the one that says grace is what I leave with you, and grace is what will lead you into eternal life. All of those things you worry about that you think are going to be the thing that makes God give up on you. I am the one who says that God never gives up on anybody, I am the one God sent to remind you that you are forgiven, and all of God's children have a place in the kingdom, both on earth and in heaven.

Emmanuel is coming into the world. Emmanuel, God with you. Not with us in a general, generic, broad concept, but God with *you*. Whatever burden, whatever sorrow, whatever worry you brought into this place with you today, you do not hold it alone, but God dwells in and among you, in your heart, next to you, arms around you, here, fully present, fully known, the deep love and presence of God in the very air we breathe and the very ground we walk on. God is with you. Take that in, the gift that that is. That is who is coming into the world, the tangible, real, loving presence of God who created and formed you, who promises to dwell you forever. That is no small thing, even if he comes in the tiny bundle of a baby.

God is dwelling with you with the promise to save you from sin. We need both of those promises so deeply, even if we sometimes choose to forget that. We need Jesus to offer forgiveness and we need Emmanuel to offer hope. We need Jesus to wipe the slate clean and we need Emmanuel to hold us close when we weep for the things that filled that slate in the first place. Just as each of us and our names, nicknames, almost names, contain multitudes, so do Jesus', and each other those names means something deep and powerful for us sitting here, just as your names mean multiple things to you. We need Jesus, we need Emmanuel, we need our Savior, we need God's presence, we need it all, and thankfully, he is coming. **AMEN!!!**