

# NAZARENE

Matthew 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a **Nazarene**."

We're taking a look at some of the more than 700 names and titles of Jesus Christ. Each Communion service we choose a title based on the letters of the English alphabet. Thus far we've discussed the following names, from A through L:

1. The Last **A**dam
2. The **B**ridegroom
3. The **C**omforter
4. The **D**oor
5. The **E**xpress Image of God.
6. The **F**irstborn from the dead
7. **G**od
8. The **H**ead of the Body
9. **I**ntercessor
10. **J**udge
11. **K**ing of kings
12. **L**amb of God
13. **M**an of sorrows

- being changed to bring change -

The name for tonight is **Nazarene**. Not *Nazarite*, which is something entirely different. A Nazarite was someone who took a vow to abstain from cutting their hair or beard; from drinking of the fruit of the vine; and from becoming defiled by touching dead things. The vow was usually temporary – although there were lifelong Nazarites, notably Samuel and John the Baptist.

A Nazarene is a person from the village of Nazareth. Jesus is many times, in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts, referred to as Jesus of Nazareth. Once only He is called **the Nazarene**. It's found in the second chapter of Matthew. In that chapter there is mention of four prophecies Jesus fulfilled. All four were fulfilled in Jesus' infancy. Each of the prophecies is related to a geographical location. They are Bethlehem, Egypt, Ramah, and Nazareth.

You remember the circumstances. Jesus was born and the Magi from the east traveled to Jerusalem, following the star. Thinking that the King of the Jews would certainly be born in the palace, the Magi went to King Herod and inquired where they might find the young Messiah. It set in motion the wicked plan of Herod's to find and kill the one who was born King of the Jews.

Herod called upon Jewish experts to inquire where the Scriptures said the Messiah would be born. They quoted Micah 5:2,

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
*Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah,  
*Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me  
The One to be Ruler in Israel,  
Whose goings forth *are* from of old,  
From everlasting."

An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, warning him to take his family and flee to Egypt, because Herod was seeking to kill Jesus. Jesus' escape to Egypt, was prophesied in Hosea 1:11,

Hosea 11:1 ...And out of Egypt I called My son.

Herod carried out his cruelty – killing all the male children below the age of two. It was spoken of centuries prior, by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:15 Thus says the LORD:  
"A voice was heard in Ramah,  
Lamentation *and* bitter weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children,  
Refusing to be comforted for her children,  
Because they *are* no more."

After Herod was dead, an angel appeared to Joseph again, telling him to return with his family to Judah. After being warned in another dream about further danger, Joseph settled down in the out-of-the-way village of Nazareth.

The first thing we might make note of, then, regarding this title of Jesus is that it reminds us of the providence of God. There are lots of definitions of what is meant by 'providence.' Here is one:

The continuous activity of God whereby He makes all things work out His ultimate purposes.

It is no small thing that God came in human flesh, born as an infant. A human infant might be the most vulnerable of all offspring. Add to that the fact that this baby was the target of demonic agents working through powerful but wicked men. Still, God was able – through both natural and supernatural means – to provide for the infant Jesus so He would not be killed until He offered His life freely on the Cross.

His title, [the Nazarene](#), reminds us of the providence of God. It reminds us God is constantly working in our history to cause events to work together for His glory and our good.

The next thing to note might be the prophecies themselves. The fulfillment of these four prophecies by our Lord is astonishing. Jesus fulfilled more than 300 prophecies throughout His life and in His death. The odds of a single person fulfilling even a handful of these prophecies is nearly incalculable. Let alone we are talking here about a set of prophecies fulfilled when He was yet an infant!

Notice Matthew refers to the prophets – plural – as saying [He shall be called a Nazarene](#). There is no one, single prophecy that says this. It was Matthew's understanding, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that Jesus was called Nazarene by several prophets. Where does he get that? - being changed to bring change -

There are two main ideas among scholars:

1. The first involves some cultural understanding. Nazareth was a podunk place. It was despised as a city of origin. You remember the classic question Nathanael asked of Philip in the Gospel of John, [Can anything good come out of Nazareth?](#) (John 1:46). The idea here is that the prophets all predicted that Jesus would have humble, even humiliating, origins and upbringing which is summarized by His growing up in Nazareth and being called a Nazarene.
2. The second idea about Jesus being called a Nazarene is that it is a derivative of the word for *branch*. In Hebrew, the word "branch" is *netzer*, actually only three consonants: NZR. The

town **NaZaReth** contains the same three primary letters (plus an ending often attached to nouns). In the Aramaic form of *Nazareth*, it comes very close in sound to the Hebrew word for "branch." Jesus is called **the Branch** in Isaiah 11:1. The Branch is a title given to the Messiah. Thus the **Branch** came from the *City of Branches*.

As with so many things, why must we choose one? Both ideas may be true. The Holy Spirit may have intended both of these, as well as other ideas we have not discovered.

Fulfilled prophecy is a phenomenal proof that the Bible is the Word of God. Calling Jesus **the Nazarene** reminds us not just of the four prophecies in Matthew chapter two; or the more than 300 Jesus fulfilled; but of all of the prophecies in the Word of God.

Most precious, though, about the title is how it identifies Jesus with the human race. He was always God; the Second Person of the Trinity; the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He became a man. When He did, He came to the least village imaginable in the Holy Land. No one would have picked it as the home of the Messiah. Nothing good could come out of there!

Nazareth was about 55 miles north of Jerusalem. It was a disreputable place. I don't want to make any suggestions as to a modern equivalent! Use your own imagination.

We've all heard, or read, or seen stories, about folks who work hard to get themselves out of a place and make something of themselves. Nazareth was a place like that. No one wanted to be there; if you got out, you didn't want folks to know you were from there.

### **No one worked hard to get there and settle down!**

First century Jews considered Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth proof enough that He could not be their Messiah. Jerome, an early Christian, recorded in his writings that Christians were often cursed by being called Nazarenes. It was a title of reproach from unbelieving men.

To be called the **Nazarene** is a title of derision; of scorn; of contempt; of spite. It is belittling; demeaning; bigoted. It is a slur and an insult.

It reminds us of the other insults leveled against Jesus:

1. He was accused of being illegitimate. No one believed the story that He was born of a virgin!
2. He would be accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, because He was often in the company of disreputable sinners.
3. He was accused of being demon-possessed.
4. He was accused of blasphemy by the religious leaders.

We could never begin to comprehend what it must have been like for God to bear this kind of treatment from His own creation. But He did.

*He did it for you!*

It speaks of His passion. Normally we associate the term 'passion' with the physical sufferings of Jesus. We talk about Passion Week. The film, *The Passion of the Christ*, was all about physical suffering.

When I think of Christ's passion, I think more in terms of His passionate love for me; and for you; and for the human race. He bore those insults and injuries for you because of His passion.

- being changed to bring change -  
Nazareth may have been podunk from the perspective of Jerusalem; or Rome; or any of the world's great cities.

But from Heaven's perspective, every city on earth, and the earth itself, is a Nazareth. There's no comparing at all. Oh, the love of God, that He sent His Son to Nazareth, and the greater Nazareth of the entire world.

