

# Is It OK to Name Your Baby 'Messiah'?

Three out of four (74 percent) Americans say parents should be able to give their child religious names—including **Messiah**—according to a survey from Nashville-based LifeWay Research. A similar number (75 percent) say a judge should not be allowed to change a child's name for religious reasons.

The name **Messiah** made headlines in the summer of 2013 after East Tennessee judge Lu Ann Ballew ordered Jaleesa Martin to change her son's name from Messiah to Martin.

Jaleesa Martin and the baby's father, Jawaan McCullough, had been in court because they disagreed about the child's last name.

"**Messiah** is a title, and it's a title that has only been earned by one person, and that one person is Jesus Christ," Ballew said at the time.

Ballew's ruling was later overturned. She now faces a possible citation for her ruling and, according to published reports, had until Jan. 6 to respond to a complaint filed with a state judicial board.

At the time of her ruling, the judge expressed concern the child would be teased because of his name. But it turns out that *Messiah* is a surprisingly common name.

**Messiah** was the 387th most popular boys' name in the United States for 2012, just after *Scott* and right before *Jay*, according to the Social Security Administration. That's up from 904th place in 2005.

When asked if parents should be able to name their child **Messiah** or *Christ*, 53 percent of Americans strongly agree and

another 21 percent somewhat agree.

Only one in five (21 percent) disagree, with 10 percent strongly disagreeing and 11 percent somewhat disagreeing.

Researchers also asked Americans to respond to this statement “Judges should be allowed to change the name parents give their children if there are religious implications to those names that some people might find offensive.”

Sixty-one percent strongly disagreed, while another 15 percent somewhat agreed.

About 1 in 5 agreed, with 8 percent strongly agreeing and another 11 percent who somewhat disagree.

“This is a case where a parent’s rights, child advocacy and a judge’s religious convictions meet,” says Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research. “Despite the fact that the majority of Americans consider themselves Christians and that the judge voiced an orthodox Christian position of there being only one person who earned the title **Messiah**, three out of four Americans put a parent’s right to name their child above considerations about religious offense or the beliefs of their own religion.”

“Personally, I am partial to the name Scott,” McConnell adds.