

The Holy Name of Jesus
Sermon Delivered Jan 1, 2022
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Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Good morning! Happy New Year!

I hope you are enjoying the Christmas season part of our liturgical year.

Lets see, in the 12 days of Christmas season song that might be 8 maids-a-milking, and in today's climate I might make allowances for coconut milk and other milk substitutes. And in doing so, I might try adjusting this verse like a chant: "My true love gave me 8 acres of coconut cultivation in Belize."

And some people have associated each of the 12 days of Christmas with a theological point, such as 8 maids-a-milking equalling the 8 beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, in the Sermon on the Mount.

However that may be, the focus for today in our liturgical calendar is on the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, a commemoration sometimes abbreviated simply as "the Holy Name" or "the Holy Name of Jesus". The day in the Biblical account is his naming day, his circumcision day, found in the Gospel of Luke (2:21) where Luke mentions that on the day of his circumcision he was named as per the Angel's direction at the time of his conception (Luke 1:31, and the significance of his name is found in the equivalent section of the Gospel of Matthew (1:21-24).

Jesus was not baptized as an infant. Jesus' baptism does not take place until he was an adult. In Christianity as per Acts 15 and as per St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, Baptism superceded circumcision and became the official entry rite to the life of the people of God, the Church. In Jesus' day, circumcision was the typical rite for inclusion in the people of God.

What's in a name?

Jesus' name has the significance of "saving God's people from their sins." To get a flavor of this, the Greek Old Testament (written for people who spoke Greek and was used at the time the Greek New Testament) has the word for "Joshua" in the Book of Joshua as the same spelling as "Jesus" in the New Testament. So, liberator, might be a metaphorical equivalent for both Jesus and Joshua.

Matthew points to Isaiah and adds another significance: Jesus is the Immanuel, "God with us."

And you find the overall story arc for the significance of these meanings in the Nicene Creed, where the Creed focuses on Jesus and God's plan, and how the three persons of the Holy Trinity interact. Jesus is the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and

John mentions his significance as the Word of God in the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) pointing to the purpose of the Gospel of John, and my paraphrase of the reason for Jesus' being "God with us" (John 20:31): "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (anointed one of God - a title), the Son of God (being God - the person), and that by believing (acting on our beliefs is implied - what we do in the Name of Christ, on behalf of Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God) - that you may have God's eternal life, that is life in Jesus' Name. By being filled with the Spirit of God, you can be a walking example of what eternal life is like, for others. A light in the darkness, even if we don't get it quite right. People look at you and see something different.

I remember one part of the sermon preached at Julie and my marriage service. The preacher said something to the effect that because of who we are in Christ, when people would look at Julie and myself, they would see Jesus. That was awe-inspiring, and I thought - "what a responsibility." At the time I was a business executive, and I thought I had put the path to potential ordination out of my life for good. I didn't realize that my marriage to Julie was going to be a pre-requisite.

Later in life, as missionaries in Peru Julie and I were in a taxi, and we are talking with a taxista (taxi driver) in Spanish. At first the ride was typical: negotiate your fee before you get into the taxi, and the driver takes you to your destination. We did not say that we were missionaries. And somewhere along the way, he asked us: "Are you missionaries?" It was the way we carried ourselves, and he started to share a personal pastoral issue with us, and as we approached the Cathedral - where we were going early on a Sunday morning (very little traffic at that time of day), as we talked, we noticed that he was slowing down, taking it in. It was for him an encounter with God. So, something similar might be a reality for each of us.

God, the Holy Trinity, is in the salvation business. If we have an opportunity to think about it, this is really important, saving us from our sins. It's an authentic relationship with God, deep and abiding. I sometimes wonder how much people really appreciate what this means.

A lot of people on their death bed really get this. This means, by being saved: in eternity you have a place with God, the family of God, the Church of God, the eternal organization of God as the Church (God incorporated). In eternity you can see a fuller vision of God. You would be anchored in God - part of God's human lineage for eternity, you would be part of God's actions in eternity, in the eternal now and forever. We might begin to grasp some of that now, in this life, with the leading of God's Holy Spirit, with Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, in day to day blessings of God's wisdom, peace, love, joy, and the other fruit of our relationship with God, God's people - both those now part of God's people and those yet to become part of God's people, and God's Holy Spirit.

Our place with God, our relationship with God, can be realized to a degree when we encounter God in this life. What we see now is only partial, as St. Paul points out. What we see later is clear and full, as St. Paul points out.

A lot is packaged in the Name of Jesus. The Name "Jesus" can become a short-hand for this relationship with God, and sometimes it may be a good idea to step back and see the forest for the trees, so to speak.

Recognizing God's presence in relationships and events, in ministry, in vocation, in the day to day, in our worship services, and more can be a vast journey, led by the Holy Spirit of God as Jesus' presence among us, as we venture forth day by day in this life, in preparation what what is down the road in the next. As in the Chinese saying, it all begins and continues one step at a time, and I might add, perhaps one person at a time.

And this brings me to my voluntary assignment, to help concretize the focus on the importance of Jesus' Name: This week, try to become sensitized to the activity of the Holy Trinity of God at work in your life in one way. Perhaps this might happen while shopping, while trying to park your car, in your vocation, while eating a meal, reading your Bible, praying, in a worship service, in a conversation, in something you do as a form of ministry, taking the dog for a walk - weather permitting, whatever.

A prayer.

Heavenly Father, in this Christmas season, help us to see your Holy Trinity at work in at least one way, a way that might inspire us to: do, say, or think something in Jesus' Name, that all would be done in your way, in your time, and to your glory. And, in Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

God bless you.