

Pastor Joe Polzin
 Luke 1:26-38
 “Call His Name... Jesus”
 Year B – Advent Midweek 1
 December 6, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you like your name? Some people like their names, whether it's their first or last name; they may even be proud of their family background and an illustrious ancestor or two. Other people don't like their names, and some may even go so far as to have their names legally changed, perhaps in an effort to disassociate themselves from their family. Children may sometimes wish they had a different name, like the name of an actor or athlete they admire.

In older times, names, and especially last names, helped identify the people of a town or village. The person called “Miller” milled wheat into flour. “Smith” was the local blacksmith or metal worker. Names like “Anderson” or “Nelson” described a family's lineage.

And in many ways, our names work in a similar way for us today. For better or worse, your name is “who you are.” Your name identifies you to the world.

In Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet asks Romeo to deny his family name for the sake of their love for each other. Juliet says, “O be some other name! What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet!” That's true enough, but many names do not leave behind a sweet smell at all, and those names are forever linked to the deeds and the character of their owners. There are names we associate with the worst kinds of evil, for instance, names like Hitler and Stalin. The names of Benedict Arnold and Judas are synonymous with a “traitor.” But there are *good* names and identities too, names we associate with great achievements and excellent character, names like Mother Teresa, Rosa Parks, Jonas Salk and, in our own church tradition, Martin Luther!

But there is still another name, the name of the child whose birth we will soon celebrate, the holy Child of Bethlehem. His is the “name that is above every name,” as we sung earlier. When he came, the time was right to fulfill what God had promised centuries before, a promise announced through the prophet Isaiah. The day was coming when the watchmen guarding Israel would sing for joy because they were finally going to see the Lord God Himself “eye to eye,” face to face. God was coming to Israel—in person. His arrival—His Advent—was announced by the angel Gabriel to a young woman named Mary, who lived in the city of Nazareth.

Mary would have a son, but a son with no earthly father. The holy child, conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit, would be the Son of God, God Himself in human flesh. He would be a descendant of King David's royal family line, and he would reign from David's throne. His kingdom would never end. Which would be amazing, because it had seemed that King David's line had been discarded, long ago, when Israel was given over to their enemies.

What was this God-man's name to be? Long ago, God had revealed His name to Moses. He was “I AM,” or put another way, Yahweh. But what would be the human name for God, when He took on human flesh? What should Mary name her little son, her *royal* son, the Son of God?

In Biblical times, parents chose names carefully, just as parents do today. Sometimes babies were named after family members. When John the Baptist was born, the relatives expected him to be named Zechariah, after his father, the priest. But Zechariah and Elizabeth, as

instructed by God through the angel Gabriel, named him John. Biblical parents might choose a name that reflected their *hopes* for their new son or daughter: Asher, for instance, means “happy or blessed”; Hannah means “grace or favor,” and there are countless other examples.

Mary and Joseph did not have to choose a name for Mary’s son. God gave them the name for His own Son—the wonderful name, “Jesus.” The angel revealed to Joseph the reason for this name. The name *Jesus* means “salvation” or “God saves.” And truly, this child would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

How does that name above every name, the name of Jesus, identify its owner? With what do *you* associate the name “Jesus”? Is that name associated with power, like a King, like the King of kings? Do you associate that name with sacrifice, like a Lamb? Do you associate that name with humility, like a King crowned with thorns, like a Lamb sacrificed on the altar of a cross? It’s of course all of these things.

The Son of God, though he was God in human flesh, did not exalt himself. He humbled himself as a servant is humble. “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). He sacrificed himself for the sins of the world, for your sins and for mine. And because of that obedient sacrifice, God the Father raised His Son up from the dead and exalted him to reign at His right hand. The day will come when every knee will bow at the name of Jesus, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Jesus is exalted because he fulfilled the promise of his name—he saved his people, he saved us all, from our sins.

Now we, the people Jesus saved, bear his name. In the world today, we carry his name, or rather, his title, “the Christ,” which means “the Anointed One.” We are followers of Jesus. We are Christians, followers of Christ.

What do people think of when they see that *you* bear that name? Does *your* life reflect the life of Jesus to people around you? If we are honest during this Advent, during this season of repentance and preparation, we have to admit that we do not always display the life of Jesus in our own lives. The humility and perfect obedience. We do not always share the love and compassion that he showed to others. We do not always forgive as we have been forgiven.

But that’s why Jesus came. That’s the wonderful *meaning* of his exalted name—“He will save his people from their sins.” He came to save you and me from our sins, the sins that earned the penalty of death for us, that earned the penalty of eternal separation from the presence of God. Jesus was innocent of all sin. And yet, he carried our sins in his own body to the cross. There he suffered the penalty of death that we had earned for ourselves. And then God raised him up from the dead and exalted His Son. He exalted the holy name of Jesus.

This exalted name, amazingly, and inconceivably, has become ours. Baptized into Christ, we have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). The exalted, holy name of Jesus covers our own names; his holy, righteous identity covers our own sinful identities. When we consider our “family name” as Christians, it’s God’s family. And when God sees us, He sees His Son.

As I mentioned this past Sunday, we are doorkeepers, anticipating the arrival of our master. We are waiting, and keeping watch. Isaiah has a similar theme, we are like watchmen on a tower or wall. In just a few weeks, we will join those watchmen of Zion who broke into joyful singing at the arrival of God in human flesh. We will celebrate the arrival of God in this world, the birth of Mary’s son, the Son of God, the holy Child who bears now and for all eternity the wonderful name of Jesus! In his name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.