

The Holy Name of Jesus year C

May I speak to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Happy New Year!

Today in our readings we celebrate a feast day that falls annually
on January 1st. The Holy Name of Jesus. We hear this word,
name, in each of our readings today.

It culminates in the naming of Jesus in our gospel reading,
though it is an understated semantic: "After eight days had
passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called
Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in
the womb."

Mary and Joseph are doing the next things in cultural and religious tradition: naming their child and having him circumcised.

The Holy Name of Jesus.

What's in a name?

For us culturally, its significance may strike us from our last names – family names. I know when I was a child family names connoted reputation or character. That still happens today. I think of neighborhood families growing up. He is one of the Fairachello's. They are all so loud. Those Buggy's they are quiet, but they do so much for the community. As a child, in my day, when we met adults sometimes for the first time, they might have asked, who are your parents? What's your last name? There was assumption that in knowing who the parents were there was a knowing of the child.

We got a hint with John the Baptist that all that was changing as the Messiah was coming. As we talked about in Advent - When John was named, the expectation was that he would be named Zechariah, after his father, or perhaps one of Zechariah or Elizabeth's parents.

But no, he was named John. It made him stand apart. This knowing by character or reputation of family was changing. And we see it also in the naming of Jesus. He was not named after his father, Joseph.

The other thing we can think of in a family with names is the familiarity. We call out the names of those we rely on or need from - they are familiar to us, we use their names, we need, and we rely on them.

The name Jesus means 'Savior,' it is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua in the Old Testament. Jesus' name shows

us who he is, what he does: saves us. Jesus is the source of our salvation.

We hear further this morning from our Philippians passage that Jesus' name is revered, respected, feared, by all – though those concepts may not be what comes to mind first for us today. It is possible that we have not really given much thought to the name Jesus.

Or maybe our familiarity carries us. When we hear the name Jesus, we might think of baby Jesus in the manger, or some pie in the sky 20 something bearded white man. But the bible tells us: "...that at the name – AT THE NAME - of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus' name is powerful in all kinds of ways we consider power: authority, strength, demanding humility, and allegiance. We may

glimpse his kingship when we consider the power. We heard in the opening of our Psalm today: “O Lord our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world.” Jesus’ power is shown in many ways in the gospels: when two or three are gathered in his Name, he is in their midst. In Jesus’ name people are healed and delivered.

This feast day began in the 12th century when the Council of Lyons recommended that followers of this Christian faith should foster devotion to Jesus’ name.

Fostering devotion to Jesus’ name? How do we do that and what does it do to us?

One way we foster devotion is pray in Jesus’ name – we do that several times each Sunday as well as in our Daily Office of Morning and Evening prayer services in our Book of Common Prayer.

To pray in Jesus' name reminds us of why we are asking for what we are asking for: We ask, in part because we think Jesus would ask for the same thing. As we heard in our Numbers reading: "So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." We, as Christians, are IN Christ – we ask as if Christ. Additionally, we ask our prayers in the name of Jesus because it is bit of boundary for us, guiderails so to speak. Like earlier when we talked about a family's reputation or character: we ask what we ask because it is in accordance with Jesus'/God's nature and character – it would be what God wants. A bit of a filter from merely praying our opinions or feelings.

Another more personal approach to fostering devotion to Jesus' name is the Jesus Prayer or Prayer of the Heart. This prayer is thought to have begun by the Desert Monastics of Egypt in the 5th Century. It also was contained in a letter written by Chrysostom early that century. Here is the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." In later practice many dropped the last phrase: a sinner: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have

mercy on me. This prayer esteems the name of Jesus and our connection to the divine.

This prayer was spoken by the lips, focused the mind, and tethered the heart. Often it was aided by holding what was then called a 'prayer rope,' but became known as a rosary or prayer beads and further began to include other prayers. The fruit, it is thought, was to quiet the inner life and foster transformation. This was because of the themes of the prayer: the power of Jesus' name, the need for humility, and the reality of dependence upon God. Those who practiced it after speaking it began to mentally pray it throughout the day silently.

I wonder, what would happen if we personally, as a prayer, simply spoke Jesus' name. Not asking anything, not telling anything, just praying Jesus' name. Maybe when we are tired, afraid, or overwhelmed. Perhaps praying the Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me. Or simply speaking the name of Jesus. In the face of anxiety or fear I think we could

experience the reality of the power of the name of Jesus. The dissipating of the roller coaster of our emotions and connection to the stability of our savior: peace.

This practice, of course, demands that we are present to what we are saying aloud or mentally – so, we cannot do it and make a grocery list at the same time...or keep feeding our worry about various outcomes at the same time. It is a tether, the one thing when we do it.

Jesus.

Jesus.

Jesus.

Jesus.

As we turn the corner in our Christmas season with Epiphany on the horizon, I want to challenge us to speak the name of Jesus as a form of personal prayer and devotion.

Connection to the Savior in turbulent times.

Let us take the exhortation of those who set this feast day in motion; to give Jesus the dignity God's name deserves, to remind ourselves that Jesus' name has been spoken throughout the world for centuries, to tether ourselves to reality and experience God's love and power while welcoming the generous gift of peace.

Amen.