

ADVENT SERMON SERIES

CALL HIS NAME JESUS:

(1) WHAT'S IN A NAME

Isaiah 52:7-10

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 1:26-38

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SCRIPTURE

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” 8 Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. 9 Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Isaiah 52:7-10 NRSV).

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11 NRSV).

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of

his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35 The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her (Luke 1:26-38 NRSV).

MESSAGE

Do you like your name? Some people like their names, both first and last names; they may even be proud of their family background and an illustrious ancestor or two. Other people do not 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 ancestry. Children may sometimes wish they had a different name, like the name of an actor or athlete they admire.

Of course, name changes aren't always for the better. A 26-year-old mechanic from England who is a big fan of the Toy Story series of movies, decided Buzz Lightyear was a cooler name than Steve Bolton. "My girlfriend is going to love telling people she's going out with Buzz Lightyear," he said. Somehow I doubt it.

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 "Carlson" or "Nelson" described family descent. In many ways, our names work the same 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 is true enough, but many names do not leave behind a sweet smell at all, and those names are forever linked to the deeds and character of their owners. There are names we associate with the worst kinds of evil, names like Hitler and Stalin. The names of Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot are synonyms for "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 Billy Graham.

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." It was time to fulfill what God had promised centuries before, a promise announced through the prophet Isaiah. The day was coming when the sentinels 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 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. What was his name to be? Long ago, God had revealed his name to Moses. He was "I AM." But what would be the human name for God himself? What should Mary name her little son, her royal son, the Son of God? In Bible 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 the baby to be named Zechariah, after his father. 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 means "happy or blessed"; Hannah means "grace or favor."

Mary and Joseph did not have to choose a name for Mary's son. God gave them the name for his Son—the wonderful name of Jesus. The angel revealed to Joseph the reason for the name. This child "will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

The name Jesus means "salvation" or "God saves." 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? 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 and became 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 death 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 we carry his name, or rather,

his title, "the Christ," which means "the Anointed One." We are followers of Jesus. We are called Christians. 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. 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 is why Jesus came. That is 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. He carried our sins in his own body to the cross. There he suffered the penalty of death that we had earned for ourselves. God raised him up from death and exalted his Son. He exalted the holy name of Jesus. 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.

In just a few weeks, we will join the sentinels of Zion who broke into joyful singing at the arrival of God-in-person. We will celebrate the birth of God in the flesh, 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!