

“What’s in a Name?”¹

Text: Luke 2:21²

New Year’s Day / January 1, 2012

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S1 – I. What’s in a Name?

“At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”

I lack the courage to ask, but often I wonder, why do parents pick the names they pick? Long gone in most of our society are the days of family traditions guiding the naming of children. And, sadly, I would say, so also the naming of children with Biblical names has gone by the boards.

In Biblical times, naming of sons was a task taken on with great care and precision. You might recall the controversy which occurred over the naming of John the Baptist. ***“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰but his mother answered, ‘No; he shall be called John.’ ⁶¹And they said to her, ‘None of your relatives is called by this name.’ ⁶²And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³And he asked for a***

¹ PR: CP 71 – Dale Hanson

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*writing tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they all wondered.*³

Had Jesus been born in Nazareth, there is no doubt similar questions would have occurred. The fact that they were in Bethlehem where they were not as well known, may have prevented the naming from being controversial.

January 1 is traditionally called, "The eighth day of Christmas." According to Hebrew tradition, which dates back to the time of Abraham, on the eighth day after birth, all male Hebrew children were to be circumcised, and given their name. As time passed, this sacramental rite of the Old Testament was carried out at either the local synagogue, or, if the parents were near Jerusalem, in the temple. Bethlehem, being near Jerusalem, provided Mary and Joseph opportunity to bring their son, as an infant, to the Temple.

And they named him, Jesus."

A. His is a UNIQUE name

There is a uniqueness in this name. While others had used this name, in the hope that perhaps their child would be the promised Messiah, this time the command of Gabriel, and therefore of God Himself, accompanied the naming. The uniqueness lies in the authenticating of the name by Gabriel.

This Jesus is the One of whom we confess: ***"He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the virgin Mary..."*** This is the One of whom St. Paul would write: ***"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth***

³ Luke 1:55-63 (See also 64-80)

his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”⁴

This unique child submitted to the Law, even to the point of blood-shed at a mere eight days of age, thereby identifying himself with those He had come to save. This is the One, no one else in all of history *could* save His people from their sins.

B. His is a PROPHETIC name

His name is unique, and it is prophetic. His name means “Savior.” Through this name, God the Father is declaring, in words He would vocalize later, ***“This is My beloved Son.”⁵*** Only Jesus *could* save His people from their sins; only He *would* save His people from their sins!

To save is not to refine the severity of the Law, nor is it to expound on the Law; to save is to deliver sinners from the dread consequences of the Law. St. Paul says it best in Romans 6: ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁶*** Peter adds: ***“To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”⁷***

⁴ Galatians 4:4-5

⁵ See Matthew 3:17

⁶ Romans 6:23

⁷ Acts 10:43

C. His is a REALISTIC Name

This unique – prophetic name is a realistic name. God chose a name for His Son that addresses our need. Even with this as His name, most of those who came in contact with Him, misunderstood or ignored or despised His name. His mission could not have been more clearly defined. His name says it all.

Yet, His mission was repeatedly challenged. There was the day when a crowd decided they wanted Jesus to be their earthly King. ***“Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew to the mountain by himself.”***⁸ When the scribes and Pharisees challenged His authority: ***He answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”***⁹ When others wondered about Him, Jesus said: ***“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***¹⁰ Even Satan could not persuade Him away from His assigned mission.¹¹

His name is Jesus! He confronted every false-teaching, every misunderstood idea of who He was. He said, clearly: ***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”***¹²

Sick with sin, sick with the consequences of sin, sick unto eternal death, Jesus, the unique, the prophetically promised, the real Son of God meets our needs.

⁸ John 6:15

⁹ Matthew 12:39

¹⁰ Mark 10:45

¹¹ See Matthew 4:1-11

¹² Luke 5:31

D. Great Power in Jesus' Name

His name is the most powerful name. So powerful, in fact, that everyone who comes to Jesus through Baptism or through the Word, is drawn into a relationship with Him. Through the Means of Grace Jesus changes lives.

E. Power to Draw us TOGETHER

In the name of Jesus we are drawn together. We are *HIS* body of believers, His holy Christian and apostolic church, His communion of saints.¹³ His because Scripture says: ***“... to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...”***¹⁴

This fellowship opens to us the gates of heaven. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers: ***“... to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [He is] both their Lord and ours.”***¹⁵

We do not depend on any human criteria, but only on the wonderful name Jesus, our Savior and Lords.

F. Power to Elicit WORSHIP

This powerful name of Jesus leads us to respond in acts of worship and praise. Knowing all that Jesus did for us, and realizing how much He loves us even now, and

¹³ See AC2

¹⁴ John 1:12

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:2

living in anticipation of what He yet will do, we bring Him our worship and our praise. We join St. Paul to declare: ***“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”¹⁶***

And again: ***“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”¹⁷***

We rejoice in the opportunity to worship, knowing that, as Jesus said: ***“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”¹⁸***

G. Power to Inspire MISSION

We believe, teach and confess, ***“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”¹⁹***

Knowing the meaning of His name, knowing His mission among us, encourages us to share His name. Of St. Paul, and of all believers, Jesus said: ***“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”²⁰***

¹⁶ Philippians 2:9-11

¹⁷ Colossians 2:9-10

¹⁸ Matthew 18:20

¹⁹ Acts 4:12

²⁰ Acts 9:15

We even have this desire to share the Word expressed in the Christmas gospel: ***“And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.”***²¹

Bernard of Clairvaux

The twelfth century churchman, Bernard of Clairvaux²² summed up our text, desire and mission when he wrote:

***The name of Jesus is both light and nourishment ...
as honey to the taste, as melody to the ear,
a songs of gladness in the heart,
so is the name of Jesus.***

And medicine it is as well. ...

***None but the name of Jesus
can restrain the impulse to anger,
repress the swelling of pride,
cure the wound of envy,
bridle the onslaught of luxury,
extinguish the flame of carnal desire,
temper avarice,
and put to flight impure and ignoble thoughts.***

***When I name the name of Jesus,
I call to mind at once
a Man meek and lowly of heart,
benign, pure, temperate, merciful,***

²¹ Luke 2:18

²² 1090-1153

***a Man conspicuous for every
honorable and saintly quality,
and in the same Person the Almighty God,
so that He restores me to health by His example
and renders me strong by His assistance.***

***No less than this is brought to my mind by the name
of Jesus whenever I hear it.***²³

May this unique, prophetic, realistic, powerful name of Jesus draw us together as His people, elicit from us the finest of worship, and inspire us to even greater mission, as by His grace we enter the year of our Lord 2012. Grant this to us all, O Lord, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

²³ <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/2158951/posts>