

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Sermon for New Year's Day, 2018

Luke 2:21

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 2:21 **On the eighth day, when the time came to circumcise the Baby, He was named “Jesus,” the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What's your name? Everyone has one. What is a name? A name is nothing but a handle or label by which we identify each other. But it wasn't always that way. Take for example, the births of Jacob and Esau.¹ When the time came for Rebekah's babies to be born, there was something unusual about each of them. The first was completely covered with reddish-brown hair. That earned him the name Esau, which may mean “hairy”; he was also called Edom, which means “red.” The younger twin entered the world with his arms stretched out and holding on to his brother's heel. His name means “heel-grabber.” Someone present at the birth may have even thought that he looked as though he wanted to hold his brother back so that he himself could be the firstborn. The name his parents chose for him may have been given innocently enough, but as Jacob's life story unfolds, his name came to suggest “one who trips up another, who defrauds him.” We know that on at least one occasion the older twin interpreted the name Jacob that way² (27:36).

Names meant much in those days. They either described a person's nature or character or expressed the feelings and hopes of the parents. After

¹ Genesis 25:19ff

² Genesis 27:36

Rachel's sister and competitor, Leah, had 10 children, Rachel called her first son Joseph, which means "may the LORD increase," because she hoped for another child. God did give her another son, whom she called Benjamin, which means "son of my right hand," or "son of happiness."³

Our own personal names might have meanings, but I don't know if the names we were given by our parents was because our parents knew what our names meant, or simply because they liked the name. I suspect that's the way we get our names today: either our parents like the sound of the name, or we are named after another person.

It doesn't really matter. What's in a name? Not much - except when we come to the names of God. His names reveal something about Him or His purposes.

So it is with the names of Mary's son - Jesus, Christ, and Lord. That's what we want to examine today. Today is the eighth day after our celebration of the birth of Jesus. On that day, like all good Jewish boys, Jesus was circumcised and given His name. On our calendars we call today New Year's Day, the beginning of a new year. But on the church calendar, today is called The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus.

What's in a name? That is the question we will ask of each name of Jesus that we examine this morning: Jesus, Christ, and Lord. First, then, the name "**Jesus.**"

Jesus is the English transliteration of the Greek name *Iēsous*, (ἰησοῦς) which comes from the Hebrew *Joshua*, (יהושע) which means "the Lord saves." The Gospel for this day, our text, says that when Jesus was circumcised, "**He was named "Jesus," the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb.**" Remember Gabriel's words to Mary: "*You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a Son, and you shall call His name 'Jesus,'*" (Luke 1:31). God picked the name, and He wanted no mistake about it. In a dream an angel of the Lord said to Joseph, "*She will give birth to a son, and you shall name Him 'Jesus.'*" And

³ Genesis 29-30

then the angel gave the reason for the name: “*For He will save His people from their sins,*” (Matt. 1:21). When this name was given to an ordinary child, it could be a reminder of God’s promise of a Saviour. In Christ’s case, it identified the one and only Saviour of the world. Jesus’ name tells who He is (God) and what He does (saves).

Jesus left His heavenly home to come into this world, where He lived as an ordinary Galilean peasant. He was known by the personal name “Jesus,” and since people back then had no second or last names, He was identified by His connection to His parents, His home, or His occupation. He was Jesus, son of Joseph⁴; Jesus, son of Mary⁵; Jesus of Nazareth⁶; or Jesus, the carpenter’s son.⁷ But in all these ways of identifying Jesus, there was something far more precious. Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. What’s in the name *Jesus*? The Saviour, who paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross, and rising three days later. The cost of all our sins has been met.

Coming to the end of another year is almost like coming to the end of a life. A person who is conscious that life’s end is near is always conscious of the many tasks yet undone. The British statesman and scholar Cecil Rhodes, of Rhodes scholarship fame, complained in his dying hour, “So much yet to be done.” But ask Jesus: “Did You do everything You came to do before you died?” and what answer does He give? You know. He spoke it from the cross: “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30). All that needed to be done for our forgiveness, for our peace with God, for our eternal happiness in heaven is finished. That’s what’s in the name “Jesus.”

What’s in the name “*Christ*”?

Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen “*the Christ of the Lord,*” (Luke 2:26). When the Wise Men came to King Herod, he asked his scholars to find out from Scripture “*where the*

⁴ John 6:42

⁵ Mark 6:3

⁶ John 18:5

⁷ Matthew 13:55

Christ was to be born," (Matt. 2:4). When Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was, Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Matt. 16:16). Caiaphas, the high priest, in Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, said to Jesus, "I charge you under oath by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus responded, "Yes, it is as you say," (Matt. 26:63-64).

Christ is not a personal name like Jesus, but a title of an office. **Christ**, the English translation of the Greek *Christos*, (χριστος), is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Messiah*, (מָשִׁיחַ) which means "the Anointed One." In Psalm 2:2, we are told that the kings of the earth take their stand against the LORD and against "His Anointed One."

When an angel of the Lord visited the shepherds out in the fields that first Christmas night, the angel said this Baby in the manger was "Christ the Lord," (Luke 2:11). This is the first occurrence of the name Christ in Luke's gospel. In the Greek translation, one would expect to find the word Christ here. Since it was customary to anoint kings in the Old Testament, the word Christ has reference to the fact that Jesus is a king, descended from David and destined to rule forever. The birth of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament promise that God would send a king, a messiah, His Anointed One, to save His people.

However, after the resurrection the name of His office, Christ, came to be connected to the personal name Jesus, as we often use it today: Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus - or as Paul often used it, "our Lord Jesus Christ."

What's in a name? What's in the name **Christ**? He is our Messiah, the One anointed to be our Mediator before the Almighty God. He is our prophet, priest, and king. What's in the name **Christ**? Our name, the name Christian. This term "Christian" was first used at Antioch⁸ and we can easily use this term to mean a little imitation or model of Christ. Jesus Christ not only brings us peace with God; He changes our lives so that we

⁸ Acts 11:26

can learn to love and forgive, to be kind and gracious as He was. That's what's in the name *Christ*.

What's in the name *Lord*?

The word *Lord* was used in the Greek culture in New Testament times to refer to anyone who owned property or slaves. It was a term of respect toward superiors - something like "sir." At first, this is the way it was used toward Jesus. But when someone came to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, they called Jesus "Lord" in the way the Old Testament used the word *Lord*. There it means the Almighty God. When the fisherman Peter, on the shores of the sea of Galilee, realised who Jesus was, he fell on his knees and said, "*Go away from me! For I am a sinful man, Lord,*" (Luke 5:8).

Jesus used the title Lord to refer to Himself as God. For instance, He referred to Himself as "*Lord of the Sabbath,*" (Matt. 12:8). Also, when He sent two disciples to bring the Palm Sunday donkey, He suggested they tell the owner, "*The Lord needs them,*" (Matt. 21:3). In the upper room, after Jesus washed the disciples' feet, and before He instituted the Lord's Supper, He said, "*You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am,*" (John 13:13). And you remember doubting Thomas. When he recognised the risen Jesus, he confessed, "*My Lord and my God,*" (John 20:28).

In the story of the development of the early church (which we have in the book of Acts), we see the use of the name *Lord* change as did the title *Christ*. It became used as a personal name, but always a name filled with respect and the confession that Jesus was Master and Ruler. In this way it became the dominant method of confessing one's faith: "Jesus is Lord." Under Roman rule it became a badge of loyalty to say, "Caesar is Lord." At one time people even threw a pinch of salt to the gods while saying, "Caesar is Lord." But Christians refused both the offering to the gods and the expression. Instead they said, "Jesus is Lord." And because of it, they suffered severe persecution. But Paul assured them that one day "every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," (Phil. 2:11).

What's in the name **Lord**? It means that Jesus Christ is the Lord of my life, the Master of my destiny, the Ruler of my world. He is "*King of kings and Lord of lords,*" (1 Tim. 6:15). What's in a name? Jesus - my saviour from sin; Christ - my prophet and priest; Lord - my king and my God.

There are many other names given to Jesus besides the few we have looked at today, and we could ask "What's in a name" of each of them. But as we remember His names and find hope in them on this New Year's Day, we also remember our names. God does.

God knows my name and He knows your name, whatever it is. He has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Lord, to die and rise for us, and to gather us into His kingdom, His flock. There, Jesus promised, "*He calls His own sheep by name and leads them,*" (John 10:3). Having been called by the Holy Spirit, being baptised into His death,⁹ every time you hear the name Jesus - Christ - Lord, remember who He is and who you are. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR NEW YEAR'S DAY

Almighty and ever-living God, You have been our dwelling-place in all generations, and from everlasting to everlasting You are perfect in wisdom, power, and goodness. We worship You as our creator, protector, and provider, but, above all, for Your wonderful love in sending Your Son into the world to free us from sin for a life of joyous obedience to You.

We praise You, in particular, for the name given to Your holy Child, for it is a sign for all ages that Jesus alone is the source of all redemption and salvation for sinful mankind. We praise You that You have set Him at Your right hand in the heavenly realm, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every other name, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. Help us always to hallow the name of Jesus by a living faith in Him, and by obedience to His teaching and example. Help us to trust in

⁹ Romans 6:3

His death for us that our hope might be built on His blood and righteousness, and not on any efforts of our own.

We offer our thanks this day for the blessings of the past year and for the way You provided for our many needs. We thank You for family and friends, for home and harvest, for food and clothing, for health of mind and body, for work and leisure, for law and government, for peace and order, for our preservation in the faith, and for those precious hours in which we were able to worship and commune with You. Forgive us where we have sinned. Heal the hurt we have caused others. Forgive us the good we have left undone. Deliver us from the consequence of all our mistakes and transgressions.

Father in heaven, let Your blessing rest on us during the coming year, that we may grow in understanding of Your mercy in Christ, that in sorrow or joy we may know and accept Your loving will, that in prosperity or trial we may experience Your power working in us and know the hope to which You have called us. Give us Your Spirit so that everything we do or say may be done in the name of the Lord Jesus as we give thanks to You, our Father, through Him.

Be the shepherd of our youth, the guardian of all children, the health of the sick, and the support of the aged. Grant that in whatever happens to us we may see Your loving hand and have the sure confidence in Christ that in all things You work for good with those who love You. Be the defender of Your people everywhere. Be the constant guard of our nation. Prosper us in everything that leads to peace and righteousness. Protect us from every evil of body and soul. We ask these things in that one name in which there is salvation, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CIRCUMCISION AND NAME
OF JESUS (NEW YEAR'S
DAY)

Numbers 6:22-27

²² The LORD told Moses, ²³
“Speak to Aaron and his sons,
saying, ‘This is how you shall
bless the people of Israel. Say to
them: ²⁴ “The LORD bless you

and keep you! ²⁵ The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you! ²⁶ The LORD look on you with favour and give you peace!”

²⁷ ““In this way they will put My name on the people of Israel, and I shall bless them.””

Galatians 3:23-29

²³ Before the faith came, we were being imprisoned by the Law, locked up until the faith came, which was about to be revealed.

²⁴ Therefore the Law was our guardian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ However, now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ For you are all the

sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ because all of you who were baptised into Christ put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ Moreover, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs according to the promise.

Luke 2:21

²¹ On the eighth day, when the time came to circumcise the Baby, He was named “Jesus,” the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb.